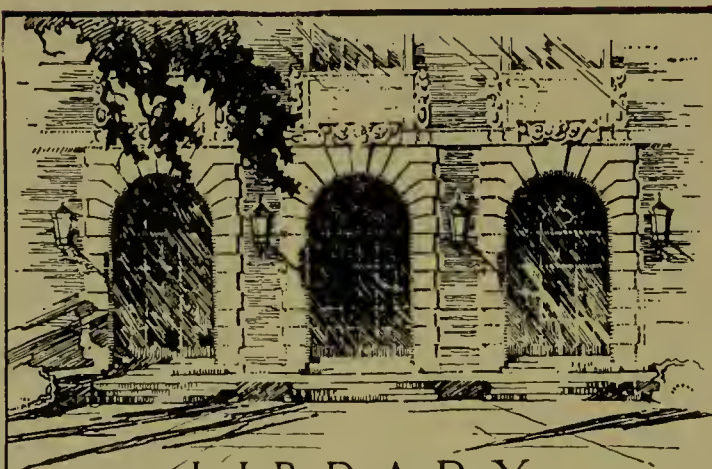
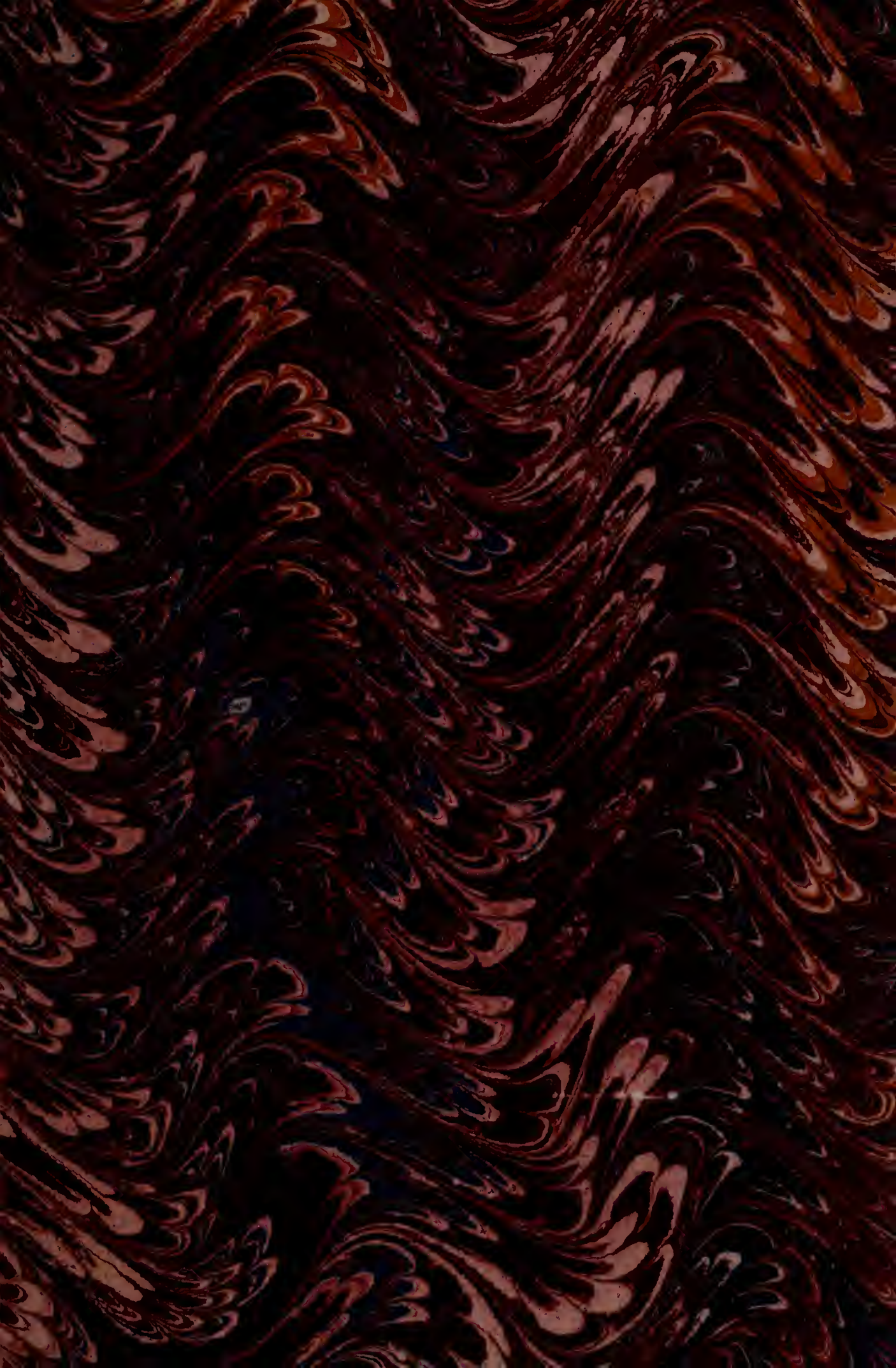


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ERRANT.

A LIFE-STORY OF LATTER-DAY CHIVALRY.

BY

PERCY GREG,

AUTHOR OF "ACROSS THE ZODIAC," ETC.

"And yet—the Light that led astray
Was Light from Heaven!"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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ERRANT.



CHAPTER I.

SPOLIA OPIMA.

“ Aimed well, the chieftain’s lance hath flown,
Struggling in blood the savage lies.”

“ A MAN’S comprehension of India don’t always answer to the length of his service here. It is possible for a man to be out twenty years, and know less than he knew when he landed as a griffin—having only unlearnt the wholesome consciousness of his own ignorance. Colonels who have spent half a lifetime here don’t know the very alphabet of Sepoy thought: there are Members of Council about as well acquainted with Native character and Native interests as—the present or late President of the Board of Control; and merchants who go home with a fortune earned by a quarter of a century’s trading in Bombay, who understand as much of Native commerce as they do of cotton-growing. I think with Darcy that half the Native Army is mad with fury, and the other half with fear; but I admit that all I have learnt from talking for years to men of every race and rank, from a syce to

a Secretary—all he has picked up in eighteen months with a knowledge of Hindostanee such as not one Captain of Sepoys in five possesses—may be as worthless as the views of those who have spent a lifetime on the edge of a world beyond whose edge they never penetrate.”

“Of course, men who never crossed the Mahratta ditch, and fancy that all India is Bengal, and all Bengal is Calcutta, are more ignorant than if they had picked up their knowledge from a score of old Indians at Cheltenham. But that’s not to the point.”

“Certainly not, Major. I spoke of moral, not geographical distance. We live among the Natives, jostle them, talk to them, depend on them for every breath we draw. But the whole world of Native thought, life, character is hidden from us; and time, spent as most of us spend it, don’t enlighten us. Six months lived *with* Natives gives a man at least as good a right to guess what they are thinking as sixteen years lived alongside of them; and the guess—is a guess, after all.”

The first speaker was a keen-looking, bright-eyed, tall, and somewhat loosely framed man of rather more than thirty, with a countenance eminently intellectual, but somewhat worn and pale: a Londoner of the clubs in manner, speech, and bearing, with a touch of the literary Bohemian, though he had not seen for the last twelve years “the sweet shady side of Pall Mall.” The other, though not actually in uniform, was evidently by air, carriage, and even dress a soldier, but one whom a long military life had not divested of the innate vulgarity and offensiveness in which a vulgar

Scotchman excels even cockney impudence—red-faced, coarse-featured, with hair of reddish-brown and thick whiskers of brownish-red, his figure and visage of that common type which tells little of the informing spirit save the broad common characters of the class in which their owner has been born and bred. Around them, in the single sitting-room of a bachelor's bungalow in the minor station of Sivapore, sat, lay, or lounged others, officers of the Company's and the Queen's service, half-formed boys and heavily bearded men.

One figure alone, out of some half-score, attracted the eye ; partly by the full uniform of the 36th Lancers, contrasting the civil or irregular dress of the others, partly by the erect, it might be slightly constrained, military attitude ; chiefly, perhaps, by the contrast which attitude and dress presented to the face and frame. The latter, though rather tall and well-proportioned, looked at a first glance slight and wanting in soldierly strength ; perhaps because the hands and feet were notably small, and the long, slender, smooth fingers and delicate palm, white, elegant, and soft as a woman's, seemed suited to anything rather than the bridle and the sword. The face was yet more feminine, not merely or chiefly from the smoothness of extreme youth, but from the beauty and delicate formation of the features : the perfectly shaped, fine nostril, the small mouth and white even teeth, the dark eyes and long thick black lashes, and the soft hair of the same raven hue, worn as long as military rule would allow. Two particulars only gave the countenance a masculine character. The slight protrusion of the lower

lip was not indeed concealed, but escaped notice, under the shadow of the full silken moustache, black as the hair, which shaded the upper; the lower part of the broad forehead was marked by the prominence of those organs, immediately above the eyes, to which the phrenologist assigns the functions of physical observation and instinctive comparison that constitute the foundation of martial capacity, and by black, straight, projecting eyebrows. There was a slight curve of scorn, a still slighter quiver of impatience in the lines of the mouth; the lids, with their long fringe, veiled the fire that had for a moment shone from the dark eyes; the face generally was calm and expressionless.

“Isn’t the wish mother—or should it be father?—to the thought, Darcy?” asked a fair-haired subaltern. “Persia has come down on her marrow-bones; Dalhousie has robbed everybody within reach that would pay for robbing; and unless our fellows get a licking in China, the mutiny they talk of will be *our* only chance of fighting—and promotion.”

This speech acted, as the daring boy meant it to act, like a bombshell: containing a number of explosive questions sufficient to set every one, save him to whom it was nominally addressed, talking at once, in their loudest tones, their angriest and most dogmatic nonsense. Happily the discussion, hot as the glaring May sun without, and peppery as the dishes just disposed of at tiffin, was promptly interrupted. A stalwart Native servant, in the costume of an Afghan warrior, and with a bearing at least as soldierly as that of any present, entered; and, saluting in military fashion the silent Lancer, laid before him a huge

rough tiger-skin, barely dried, and a white skull. The latter was thrown aside for the moment; all gathered round to examine the former.

“Very much out of condition,” pronounced the youth, confidently. “Hardly worth keeping as a trophy, or giving as a compliment, Darcy.”

“A man-eater, and a monstrous one,” said the more experienced civilian. “I heard of one that had become the terror of the peasantry for miles around Kalpore—where you were on Monday, Darcy. Where did you put up this brute?”

“He put us up not five miles from Kalpore on the road hither,” replied the young Lancer, in a very quiet, distinct, but low and almost languid tone.

“I’ll bet you a gold mohur I know where the skin goes, Darcy; even if you don’t know yet, yourself. There are two pretty American girls, with their father, at the General’s to-day; and if you don’t offer it to the eldest before you have been an hour in her company, her sister will ask for it.”

“I hope not. It is unpleasant to refuse a lady’s request; and this is bespoken.”

“Aye; one’s sister or sweetheart always secures one’s first skin a year or two in advance,” returned the boy, laughing. “But one never keeps such a promise under present temptation; and I’ll bet on the American. Come, Darcy, a gold mohur, or a sov, as you please.”

“I don’t break my promises; I don’t bet on certainties; and I don’t make a lady’s influence the subject of a wager or a debate,” answered Darcy, his brows slightly contracting. “I promised my first.”

“ You said you shot this on the Kalpore road ? ” inquired the Sepoy Major, in a somewhat sharp tone.

“ I don’t think I said so,” returned Darcy. “ Yes, Clay, it is *my* prize,” he added, in answer to an inquiring look from his young comrade.

“ Where did you hit him ? ” the Major interposed, after closely examining the skin. “ I can’t find the hole.”

There was a sneer on his face that gave a very offensive meaning to the question, and provoked looks of displeasure from most of the company ; who as English gentlemen regarded the word of a gentleman as conclusive, and as the members of a small military society were all offended by the wanton attempt to provoke a quarrel that must interfere with the general spirit of cordial comradeship on which the comfort of their life depended. The Lancer looked the speaker straight in the face for half a minute, with a glance of such undisguised contempt as repaid the affront fourfold.

“ I suppose not,” he said at last. “ Afzul ; ” and he addressed to his servant a few words in a tongue which none of those present understood, and which only one recognized as Arabic. The man folded the tiger-skin, saluted, and departed with it.

“ I wonder why you took that fellow, Darcy,” said a Captain of Bengal Irregular Cavalry. “ He was discharged from the army, and had but just come out of prison.”

“ Do you know his story, Cameron ? No ? I do : and I think no worse of a soldier, and a chief of the Koreish, for resenting on parade the insult put upon

him by one who, though his superior officer, could not pretend to be his superior, in birth, rank, or military experience."

His eyes were fixed on the Scotch Major as he spoke; but the look had lost the scornful meaning so apparent a few moments before, and seemed to the company purely accidental. Major Thomson did not appear to observe it. He rose, knocked the ashes from his cheroot, and turned to depart.

"It was well you had a rifle at hand, considering that you went to Kalpore on duty, under orders to return without delay," he observed.

"I had no rifle," Darcy said, quietly.

"Oh, indeed! You killed the man-eater with a sling, or a cherry-stone. I have read something of the kind, in the 'Arabian Nights' or—what's his name?"

"Munchausen?" suggested the Lancer, so coolly ignoring the ostentatious insolence of the other that Thomson departed in utter discomfiture, under a salute of irrepressible laughter from the whole party.

"Damn the man," cried Clay, springing to his feet. "How did you kill the beast, Darcy? You must tell us now, and give us the means to squelch Thomson the first time he recurs to it, or he'll whisper and hint through every Company's regiment in Bengal that a Lancer bought the skin and bragged of killing the brute."

"No one who knows *either* of us," retorted the other, "will think of believing him."

"That is all very well, Darcy," interposed a senior, "but his hint is just one of those spiteful calumnies

that every fool likes to believe. Besides, there *are* boasters and cowards; and men who *don't* know you will think it more likely that you belong to that class than that a lad of twenty, not two years out, killed a tiger alone, and that none of his comrades know the rights of the matter."

"I was not alone, Colonel. And if the American family Clay speaks of are at the General's, hot as it is, I shall go and pay my respects there. I shall be on duty this evening till rather late: don't let them starve me altogether if I fail to get back till you are in full swing of cheroots and brandy-panee."

About half an hour before sunset, Afzul held his master's splendid chestnut charger in front of the General's verandah. Two pretty grey Arab ponies with side-saddles were held by native grooms at a little distance, and beside them was the General's well-known black horse. Darcy came out, followed by the grey-haired stately soldier who commanded the station: a Company's officer who had lately won, rather by seniority than by service, brilliant as had been his exploits, the rank of Brigadier.

"These despatches," said the latter, "will keep me for three quarters of an hour at least; and I cannot let the children lose their ride. I dare say they will prefer your escort to mine; and as you are not on duty till half-past six, you can so arrange your ride as to reach your cantonment by a quarter past, and I will meet you there with a relief which for once will not be welcome."

As he spoke, the young ladies to whom he referred appeared; too late, fortunately, to hear the name he

had applied to them. Children, however, in the eyes of an older man than Darcy, they certainly were. The elder, though the Southern climate in which she was born and bred gave her a somewhat more womanly appearance than belonged to her years, had but just seen her fifteenth birthday. Her sister was a year or two younger. The long, soft dark brown curls, dark eyes and eyebrows of the former, contrasting the light-brown wavy tresses and light English complexion of the latter, made the difference of age appear perhaps greater than it was. The admiration and delight with which the young girls stroked and praised the graceful ponies they were about to mount were expressed with childish frankness ; but the elder received the General's excuses with an air of self-possession, and replied to them with a gracious dignity, that seldom characterize maidens of her age, except in the States.

"Darcy has a double advantage over me," said the General, "in being a younger man and, I find, an older acquaintance. You will pardon me more easily than you care to say for the exchange."

"Papa has set you the example, General," the young lady returned, as the Brigadier lifted her to her saddle, while Darcy performed the same service for her younger sister.

The party rode faster than is the custom in England. It would be dark in an hour, and at that season outdoor exercise in India is enjoyable only for some half-hour before the setting and after the rising of the tropical sun. Both the girls, but especially the elder, conversed with the perfect ease

of maidens early accustomed to society, but also with something of the simplicity of childhood as well as of the pleasant frankness of personal friendship, especially gratifying to their cavalier.

“Mr. Darcy,” said the younger, after a while, “Florence has made me promise to ask what she don’t like to ask for herself. We had set our hearts on bringing at least one tiger-skin away from India, and we should have *that* one to remember you by till we see you again. We shall see you, I have no doubt; though you say it is impossible. Everybody goes to the States one day or other, and you will not come there without paying us a visit?”

“Certainly not; though on the map the distance between New York and Louisiana seems long to be travelled, under any lighter attraction, in the short time that is allowed for a soldier’s leave—unless, indeed, he have the misfortune to be on half-pay.”

“It seems,” said the elder girl, “a little like what we have heard of those English country folk, who request a friend starting for Calcutta to take a message or a parcel for a son or cousin at Delhi or Lahore. But railways and steamers have made the journey really a short one.”

“However long it be, Mademoiselle,” returned Darcy, with a bow, “I shall not fail to call upon you if I have ever the good fortune to find myself within two thousand miles, while there is yet a hope of finding either of you in your present home.”

“You may be sure,” said the younger sister, “that Florence will have told the story of the tiger to all our neighbours within twenty miles at least; and the

skin will be there if we are not, to secure you a welcome throughout Louisiana."

There was a shade of perplexity or annoyance on Darcy's face, not unperceived by the quick eyes of his elder companion. But at this moment the party reached a point where the road divided. He was about to take that to the left when Florence interposed—

"The other road is shadier and pleasanter. Can we not get round that way in time?"

"Certainly," answered Darcy, promptly, though with a certain scarcely perceptible hesitation or reluctance in his tone.

They rode on more slowly, and Florence spoke again.

"You have not answered Eva's request," she said.

"I must entreat your pardon, and your sister's. I admit your right to the skin; but in truth it is not such as I could like to give you. The brute was what they call a man-eater; one of those aged animals which, unable longer to run down deer or other wild prey, hang about the neighbourhood of roads or villages to spring on solitary travellers or stray children. Whether their diet disagree with them, whether they are starved, or simply from age, the skins of man-eaters are seldom worth having."

"Do not say that!" answered Florence, earnestly. "You know that the value of such a gift does not depend on its beauty. I should like to have the skin of the first tiger you had shot, even if there were not a much deeper interest attached to it."

The girl's colour deepened, and tears stood in her

eyes as she turned them on her companion. She was far too much in earnest to permit him to evade a reply.

“As I said just now, Mademoiselle, your claim is incontestable ; and I feel that I must seem worse than ungracious in resisting it. I am sorry—very sorry,” he added in a different tone, as he observed her look of extreme surprise and mortification, “that the skin is no longer in my gift. Many months ago I had promised the first I might kill ; and I have kept my promise.”

“You cannot have sent it home yet,” she replied quickly. “I am sure no English lady but would wish you to give me this, with its terrible story. You may send her another and a handsomer one.”

“You honour me in wishing for it,” replied Darcy, “and nothing could excuse my refusal if it had been mine to give as I pleased. The person to whom I made my promise is the last to whom I could break it, because one who would feel the slight keenly, and is wholly unable to resent it.”

The young lady was silent, perhaps from natural displeasure as well as mortified vanity. Her companion’s attention and courtesy in the short period of their acquaintance had flattered her with a belief in her own influence which, mere child as she was, was very pleasant ; and the refusal appeared ungracious and unkind. Before she had decided whether to resent the supposed slight, before her better sense and gratitude had time to overcome the feeling of feminine *pique*, Darcy drew bridle for a moment in front of a small Indian dwelling, enclosed in a rude

neglected garden of no great extent. Near the gate, under the shade of a great banyan, stood a young girl of darker complexion and slighter form than either of his companions, with long straight black hair. Her dress, half-English half-Indian, her colour and features, and something in her manner that was certainly not English, perplexed the fair Americans; who had seen and heard enough of India to know that only a Native girl belonging to the lowest caste, which certainly was not here the case, would be thus seen unveiled in public.

The young Eurasian, for such she was, had sprung forward as she saw the party, and her movement had arrested Darcy, who had intended to pass with a silent salute.

“I thank you for your present,” she said in a sweet low voice, speaking English perfectly but with a slight peculiarity of accent. “You will tell me, when I see you next, how you killed him. When will you come here again?”

“Not this evening, Zela; nor, probably, to-morrow.”

He added a few words in Hindostanee, and Zela, whose eyes had been eagerly fixed, with a look not especially kindly, on his companions, turned slowly and re-entered the house as they rode on.

There was a certain constraint in the conversation that followed, as Darcy showed no inclination to explain what his companions could not ask. As the cantonment came in view he spoke, recurring once more to the topic which both had been content to drop.

“I know that I have displeased if not grieved you by what seems an ungracious denial of a natural and reasonable request. Believe me, if you cannot forgive:—I am more vexed to refuse you this memorial of our short acquaintance than you can be to miss a possession so naturally interesting to you. As you said, any English lady would feel that you had the best right to the man-eater’s skin if you cared to possess it; and would fancy no slight or offence in the postponement of my promise. But Zela, though she is only a child, has quick and keen feelings; and her position renders her naturally and painfully sensitive where those whose rank is assured would never imagine neglect or discourtesy. By birth she is at least our equal. By the fallen fortunes of her family, and the prejudices of English and Native society against the mixed race, she is placed in the position of an inferior and almost of an outcast. Other circumstances also would make her peculiarly alive to anything like a slight from me; and I could not prevent her fancying that I had broken my promise to her, lightly as it was made, out of regard to your superiority of race and position. When so unfortunate that I must seem discourteous to one of two ladies, I think it best to displease her to whom my conduct can only give offence and not pain, to whom it may be an affront but not a humiliation.”

The American girl looked up, her colour brighter, her eyes even moister than under the mortification of the first refusal, but with a very different expression.

“You are right, quite right,” she said, her voice trembling a little, with more emotion than the

incident might naturally have excited. "I can feel for your friend, and I would not accept anything, if you would give it, at the cost of even a seeming slight to her. But don't say, and don't think, that before I understood your motive your refusal gave me offence and not pain. It hurt me to feel that you, to whom we owe so much, were unkind to me. I was not offended—or," she added frankly, "if I was offended for a moment, I felt immediately how foolish and ungrateful it was, and how little right I could have to take offence."

CHAPTER II.

FORTES CREANTUR. .

“ Though the Great Houses love us not, we own, to do them right,
That the Great Houses, all save one, have borne them well in fight.”

THE officers at Sivapore at this time were not numerous. The station contained a battalion of Bengal Native Infantry, a regiment of Irregular Cavalry, chiefly Mahometans, from which, however, a squadron was detached on other service, and a portion of the Queen's 36th Lancers, under command of a regimental Major, whose brilliant services had obtained him the brevet rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. But several officers from each of the Company's regiments were absent, either on leave or on civil duty, and scarcely a score from all the corps present were assembled at the common mess. They had guests this evening: among them the father of the American girls, who, though quite unknown to the General, save for an introduction from his last host to whom he was equally a stranger, enjoyed the free-handed Indian hospitality of the period. A German traveller of rank, the guest of the commanding officer of the Lancers, was also present; as well as the Editor of an influential journal in the north of India—

the same whose remarks on Anglo-Indian ignorance of Native life and character introduced the conversation recorded in the last chapter. The dinner was over; the servants—except the *punkah-wallahs*, who sitting outside the room drew to and fro the pendant screens or blinds that kept up a cooling current in the hot atmosphere—had withdrawn. The American, with a Queen's officer, was playing *écarté* in a far corner of the large room. The majority of the company had gathered round the German, who preferred his huge pipe filled with Latakia to the choicest cheroots of his hosts.

“Yes,” said the traveller, “it was about the least pleasant of the many adventures with wild beasts I have seen or shared. It was fortunate that the girls were riding with their father, and not travelling in palanquin as your English women and children do. Like most Americans of the Southern States, they and their father are excellent riders. As we entered the jungle we were overtaken by a young officer in your Lancer uniform. He and Mr. Dupont were riding a little in the rear, I was in front with the girls, when we heard the roar and crash. Their ponies took fright and bolted at once, and my horse followed them for a while before I could rein him up. When I rode back, the beast was atop of Dupont's horse, and the rider underneath. The tiger had torn the horse frightfully, but apparently in trying to get at the man. My revolver was unloaded; and I should have been of little use in any case. But the officer had dismounted, having, I suppose, more command of his animal than any of us, though it galloped

past me wild with terror as I came up. The tiger would have reached and torn Dupont to pieces in another moment. Your comrade, on foot, was walking steadily towards them, his revolver levelled, evidently intending to close as nearly as possible before firing with such a weapon. When he came within some twenty paces the tiger observed him, and, turning from its helpless prey, seemed crouching for another spring. I never saw a cooler thing. The officer stood still; levelled steadily, taking careful aim, and fired. I thought him mad, for, wherever the bullet struck, it seemed impossible that a pistol ball should kill or so disable the beast as to prevent a spring that must certainly be fatal. But two reports followed one another almost instantaneously; and to my surprise the tiger sprang indeed, but dropped instantly and was quite dead in two or three seconds. After I had helped to disentangle Dupont from under his mangled horse, I looked for the trace of the bullets, wondering where they could have struck. Had they hit the brute anywhere in the body, they would have been useless. Had they struck the skull, probably they might have glanced off, or at most inflicted a wound that would have only served to madden the tiger. But your comrade had aimed straight at the eyeball, and both bullets had gone right through into the brain without cutting the skin. It would have been a good shot had it been fired at an iron target; but I know no man who could have aimed so accurately at twenty paces at such a mark. I hoped to have met the man here this evening, and told him what I thought of it."

“Darcy, by Jove!” cried Clay. “I saw, when I came to examine the skull, that the right eye-socket was damaged in two places. Truth beats Munchausen hollow, Major.”

“A parallel to that wisdom of griffinhood Evans so much esteems,” growled the Scot. “Recruits often outdare in their first battle veterans who know what danger is. A fellow who sees a tiger for the first time knows no better than to attack it on foot with a revolver; and gets the name of a hero by a fluke such as happens once in a century.”

“I grant, Major,” retorted the *enfant terrible* of the mess, “that a man of your experience would have known better than to interfere between a man-eater and his meal. Mr. Dupont,” raising his voice, “I feel that I ought to apologize for the solecism committed by one of ours in killing the tiger in so irregular a fashion, since the offender was my chum, Lionel Darcy.”

“I know it, sir,” returned the American. “I met him at Brigadier Halbert’s to-day, and he rode out with my girls this evening. I hoped to see him here.”

“I am afraid,” observed Major Thomson, with quiet malice, “that Lionel Darcy’s discretion is not so reliable as his marksmanship. Young as he is, eighteen months of India might have taught him the impropriety of introducing young ladies to equivocal company.”

“What do you mean?” cried Clay, angrily. “I’ll bet you what you like, Mr. Dupont, that your daughters are as safe with Darcy as — with the Brigadier himself. It’s a damned . . . inaccuracy.”

“ Silence, Clay ! ” interposed Colonel Vane, peremptorily. “ Major Thomson, you imply a grave charge against an officer of ours. It sounds strange that he should have been guilty of conduct certainly ‘ unbecoming an officer and a gentleman ’ under your eyes ; almost as strange that one so much his senior should not have interfered to prevent or correct the error. ”

“ I applied no such epithet to his conduct, Colonel Vane, ” answered the other sulkily. “ I don’t think Mr. Darcy saw me ; and I had not time to interfere. ”

“ Explain yourself, if you will have the goodness, ” said Dupont, quietly but sternly. “ To whom were my daughters introduced ; and when, and how ? ”

“ I don’t know that there was any formal introduction. The young ladies were riding with Mr. Darcy, and stopped with him, when he checked his horse to talk with a person with whom his intimacy is somewhat notorious. ”

“ It is curious that I, his friend and commanding officer, know of no such intimacy, ” rejoined Vane, significantly.

“ The frequency of his visits to the house of the Indian woman who passes as Manton’s widow is known to every officer in the station, except yourself. ”

“ And to me. Long before he was ‘ broken, ’ the Ranee was legally married to Captain Manton. Was it to her, or to Miss Manton, that Darcy spoke this evening ? ”

“ To the daughter, of course. If Mr. Dupont thinks the half-caste daughter of a cashiered officer, with whom a young man like Darcy spends more time than

in the society of English families, a proper associate for his daughters, it is no affair of mine."

"Certainly not, Major Thomson," replied the Louisianian, his cheek slightly flushed, his lower lip compressed by a projecting tooth. "Perhaps, Colonel Vane, you or some other of Lieutenant Darcy's friends will state—what I do not understand from this gentleman—whether I have any reason to be annoyed by his speaking to the young lady in question in my daughters' presence?"

"The young lady," said Clay, scarlet with anger, "is a child to whom Darcy has shown the kindness an English soldier may well feel for the daughter of an unfortunate soldier, and a gentleman of birth and breeding for the descendant of princes."

"The *unfortunate* father was cashiered some years ago for drunkenness, and shot himself in *delirium tremens* a year before Darcy came out; the Indian grandfather was an impostor turned out of his usurped talookdaree by the Commissioner; and an Eurasian girl of twelve is woman enough for mischief," answered Thomson sullenly.

"Let me set your mind at rest, Mr. Dupont," said Evans, the journalist, interposing for the first time, though he had vigilantly heeded the controversy. "Darcy may not be prudent, either for his own sake or hers, in parading his contempt for the current prejudices that affect this girl and her mother. But, except her mixed blood, there is nothing against her. Child or not in fact, she is to him simply a child and a pupil. His acquaintance with them arose out of compassion for the calamity entailed on them by the

father's vices ; his strong interest in them is due to his sympathy with a house as old and as unfortunate as his own. Though scarcely twenty, he knows quite as well as Major Thomson what becomes a gentleman, and would be the last man in India to forget it. That he spoke to Zela Manton in Miss Dupont's presence is proof absolute of the loyalty of the friendship he has offended all the station by proclaiming. The girl was growing up as rude and uncultured as poor ; he has spent his leisure in giving her that English and Christian culture of which her mother is of course ignorant ; anxious, as he would put it, that she shall grow up as befits the daughter of those who were great Indian nobles when his own ancestor entered the service of Charlemagne."

"Strangely combined affectations for a British subaltern," sneered Thomson ; "the pretender to a fabulous lineage playing tutor to a half-caste school-girl !"

"Darcy is a scholar ; I know nothing of his skill as a teacher," returned Evans. "But, my father having been an English King-at-Arms, I know something of genealogy ; and you will find *his* in so well-known a book as that of my mother's father—Lord-Lion under George IV. Indeed, the pedigree of the Darcies of Ulswater, since their founder became the sworn knight of Margaret of Anjou, is as much matter of history as the Queen's descent from the House of Cerdic. Cameron, I don't doubt you have heard, among the Jacobite legends of your nursery, the story of the last Lord Ulswater and his son—the grandfather of Lionel's grandfather."

“*Ach so!*” said the German, with a long sigh of satisfaction, that for a moment enveloped him in a dense cloud of smoke. “Gentle blood must fill the pulse that beat so steadily within reach of the tiger’s claws. Let us hear the *saga*, Captain Cameron.”

“It is a true story, Count, though I had never dreamt of Darcy’s connection with it, which says much for his reticence. The Darcies, though Catholics, were always more loyal to the Crown than to their Church, and kept lands and lives under the Tudors. With the Stuarts they were in high favour, which of course cost them dear in the end. Two of them died on the scaffold and three in the field for Charles I.; and but a single heir of the house returned to reclaim estate and title at the Restoration. He and two of his sons were killed in 1689. The youngest, a lad of seventeen, was carried severely wounded from Killecrankie. William of Orange did not desire the odium of putting a boy to death, and could not confiscate the estates for the benefit of his Dutch favourites without an attainder. In 1715, Lord Ulswater joined the abortive insurrection in Scotland. Then the greater part of the lands were forfeited, and he escaped to France, where the elder branch of his family were high in fortune, rank, and royal favour. He, at the age of seventy-three, and his son about thirty, served through the whole of Charles Edward’s campaign; and charged beside Lord George Murray at Culloden. After the battle, with two or three of their own retainers, they were safely hidden among rocks and heather, when Cumberland and part of his staff and escort rode by. Any other man would have lain quiet. But

there was on the staff the then holder of Lord Ulswater's estates, whom he accused of especial treachery and bad faith in profiting by his attainder. He fired within a few paces, and the man fell dead by his chief's side. The ball of the second pistol is said to have gone through the Duke's cocked hat. The Jacobite party fought to the death, but of course were overpowered in a few seconds. Father and son, both badly wounded, were made prisoners and carried to London. It was known or suspected by a minister high in office and influence under George II. that young Darcy possessed a secret fatally compromising one of the most illustrious ladies of the Court—a lady whose petition for his life could hardly be refused. To get hold of this secret, which could be used with terrible effect in many probable contingencies, the minister would have given both pardon and reward. But when he sent an officer to hint at such a bargain, Darcy, fettered as he was, at the first word struck the man with his manacles, and left on his face a visible token of infamy which the suborner carried to his grave. Darcy's young sister, a mere girl, managed to come over and to obtain an interview with him in the Tower. She asked afterwards for an audience of the lady in question, which was granted. But this grace was only a snare. As she entered the Palace, the minister had her seized, brought to his office, and searched with gross rudeness and insult. They found nothing but an envelope bearing the seal of her family, with its legend '*Loyal à mort.*' The minister opened and found in it merely some burnt paper, the relics of three or four letters, of which only a cipher in the

corner of each was still distinguishable. These fragments, proving the destruction of her letters, and the motto, avouching the sender's silence and the lady's security, were the whole of the message, perfectly clear to her, perfectly useless to her enemy. The minister caused the envelope to be refastened with the seal apparently intact, and had it conveyed to its owner as coming directly from Miss Darcy, who was said to have entrusted to the supposed letter the purpose of the intended audience. It proved that in thus assuring the lady of her safety Darcy had deliberately renounced his last chance of life. A few days afterwards he was brought to trial, and died with his father on Tower Hill. The minister had made, however, a mortal enemy of the personage in question, and it was not long before his official career was at an end for ever. Seventeen or eighteen years later, he was introduced by our ambassador at the house of one of the reigning queens of Parisian fashion, the aunt of a youth who had lately succeeded to the Marquisate and other titles of the House of Ultramar. Treated with cold but marked politeness both by this lady and her nephew, he remarked as he left the salon that he had surely seen the face of its mistress before. The next morning he received a visit from an officer in the Royal Guard, who brought him a challenge from the Marquis of Ultramar. Unwilling to accept the challenge, he was warned that if he refused he should receive such public insult as would leave him no alternative but to fight, or incur utter disgrace and social excommunication. As challenged, he had the choice of weapons, and chose the pistol, then seldom

used in France. On the ground, the Marquis told in a very few words the story of the insult offered to his aunt, and of his father's death, denouncing his antagonist as the author of both crimes. At the first shot, both the combatants seemed unhurt. At the second, the Marquis's right arm dropped to his side, broken by the English bullet. Both seconds then endeavoured to stop the duel. The Marquis insisted, and the third time, with his left hand, shot his opponent through the brain. The first shot had pierced the victor's side, but evoked no sign."

"Savage and senseless ferocity," Thomson pronounced; but the sympathy of the audience generally went evidently with the relator.

"It is clear, I think," said Vane, "that the Marquis and his father felt, as all gentlemen feel, that a man's life is cheap in comparison to a woman's honour. But what is Darcy's exact connection with the French nobleman in question?"

"The House of Ultramar," said Dupont, "were, I remember, all but exterminated in the French Revolution, and its last chief perished in the war of *La Vendée*. His heir, however, was brought up in England, and was, I think, restored to his French honours, though not his estates, by Louis XVIII."

"Yes," replied Evans, "and he was Darcy's grandfather. His son still retains that old Grange and those few hundred acres of mountain and dale that escaped the confiscation of 1715."

"But," said Thomson, "scores, not to say hundreds, of English families not particularly distinguished can trace their descent as far as Henry VII. You claimed

for your friend a pedigree traceable to the days of Charlemagne."

"The steadfast adherent of the House of Lancaster," rejoined Evans, "who received the Westmoreland estate from Henry VII. after the battle of Bosworth, was a younger son of the then Marquis of Ultramar. I dare say Mr. Dupont can tell you what part that house played in the history of France."

"Since the reunion of Burgundy and Provence," was the reply, "scarcely any noble house in France has a more continuous or more honourable historical record. In no generation did it fail to furnish the King and kingdom with distinguished statesmen and soldiers; and its chiefs were Peers of France while France had a Peerage."

"And," said Evans, turning to the German, "probably the Count von Arnheim can vouch for the earlier history of a family which held fief under the Empire till Burgundy became French?"

"*Ach so*," replied the German. "The chiefs of that house have left their mark in history since the days of Carl der Grosse. If we can rely on any chronicle of those days, it is true that their ancestor was a Dane who took service with the first German Emperor of the Romans, during his wars in Saxony. They disappeared for a short time from German history after the first crusade, when their chief won a fief in Palestine under the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. His descendants held his fortress till every other vestige of that kingdom was swept away by the Saracens. Their heir returned to become a Count of the Empire, and to give to his castle on the

frontiers of Burgundy and Provence the name borne by the last Christian barony in the Holy Land."

"Well," said Thomson, "affectation is generally supposed to be the weakness of middle class men uncertain of their position; simplicity is claimed as the virtue natural to high birth; and Darcy is as affected a puppy as any son of a Parisian *roturier*. Even his religion seems chosen for the sake of singularity; and if he went to Church and did not ostentatiously dine on fish on Fridays, no one would find out that he was a Papist by any act or word that proves him a Christian."

"A Scotch Presbyterian should not blame him for holding loosely to a bad creed which happens to be the creed of his fathers," returned Evans. "But if they are not belied, their family tradition rather than their nominal faith has been the religion of his forefathers, French and English."

"Is there not," asked Clay, "some ballad, or something of the sort, that gives a not very amiable picture of their qualities, of which they are as proud as a Highlander of ancestors who for a score of generations were hung at Stirling for cow-stealing, or what they called cattle-lifting?"

This boyish sarcasm so stung one or two other young officers present, that Vane, though as averse as most men to after-dinner recitals, pressed Evans if he knew them to repeat the verses, by way of diversion.

"What I remember," said the latter, "is a mere fragment, but it runs somewhat to this effect. The arms of the Darcies, by the way, are, like most very

old coats, exceedingly simple:—Azure, a silver star in dexter chief, and sword bend-wise.

“ ‘Crystal-clear and azure-leal,
Name of silver, soul of steel,
Honour stainless as the sword,
Woman’s faith as manhood’s word;
Dauntless daring, ruthless pride,
Lips that never blached or lied,
Never wronged a foeman’s fame,
Never told a lady’s shame;
Eyes that ne’er from question quail,
Rarely plead and not prevail,
Eyes that front with equal glance
Headsmen’s axe and hostile lance,
Battle-cross and bosom-scar—
Mark the race of Ultramar.

“ ‘Iron hand in mortal feud,
Velvet-soft to womanhood—
Rock, that passion’s lightnings rend,
Steel, that maiden-fingers bend—
Man may bootless plead and ’plain,
Never woman sued in vain!
Frank of faith as true to trust,
Lady’s smile and traitor’s thrust
Mailless still, in peace and war,
Find the heart of Ultramar.

“ ‘Never spared they spoken doom;
Never smote, but hard and home;
Never sought, in sorest need,
Comrade’s aid or fealty’s meed.
Never pardon have they given;
Never sued it, save from Heaven.
Dangerous most when crushed and thrown,
Strongest when they stand alone,
Calm, when life is on the cast,
Deadliest when they strike their last.

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“ ‘Thrice shall set the silver Star,
Thrice to westward rise afar.
From the crimson dawn it came;
Crimson clouds of sunset flame
Where the ebbing tide of war
Whelms the crest of Ultramar.’ ”

As the last word was spoken, amid the undisguised yawns of the elder part of the company, the affected indifference of some and the obvious interest of others among the youngsters, the subject of the conversation entered.

“You are very late, Darcy,” remarked one of his comrades. “You cannot have been on duty so long. Have you been loitering with your Princess of the fairy tale?”

Darcy’s brow darkened, and the fire in his eyes was such as the speaker hardly cared to meet; but he answered coldly—

“You, at least, Kirkpatrick, if you follow the bad modern fashion of mentioning ladies’ names in public, might respect that of an Indian House yet older than your own. No, I have not been with the Ranee or her daughter.”

“Is she a Ranee?” said another; “and if so, how came she to marry a man like Manton?”

“She is,” replied Darcy, “the granddaughter of the last Rajah of Bundaghar, one of those unfortunate noblemen who were systematically robbed of their estates by that democratic school of civilians compared to whom Warren Hastings was a loyal and scrupulous gentleman. These men hated—or hate, for Lord Dalhousie has taken care that they are not extinct—a nobleman or an ancient family with the hatred of a French Republican, and went to work systematically to oust every Rajah or Nawab, every Zemindar or Talookdar, within their reach, wherever they could find a plea or invent a pretext. I think we shall reap the consequences ere long; and if *they*

were the only victims of Indian vengeance—well, it don't bear talking of. This family were reduced by the Mahometan conquest from the rank of independent princes to that of great and wealthy nobles—Howards or Stanleys. The British Commissioner stole—or is it called confiscating?—lands they had held for ages before his first ancestor put his name over a shop-door in Glasgow. How the ruined family lost caste as well as fortune, and their last descendant became the *protégée* of a French priest, is a long if a romantic tale. That apart, theirs is the history of a thousand Indian families; I have some hope that Lord —— may be induced to redress this one wrong, if the facts can be properly brought before him."

"It would go ill with India," said Thomson, "if the judgment of a British Commissioner were to be reversed to pleasure a nigger who pretended to an estate for which he could show no sort of title-deed."

"Immemorial possession, by the law of every civilized nation," returned Darcy, "is the best of all titles; and the heir of a long line of warrior princes was something more than the equal of the son of a Glasgow tradesman, even though he had crawled up to the rank of Commissioner by exaggerating the policy of his masters."

Thomson sprang up in passion; but Vane interposed.

"You can hardly be aware, Darcy, that the distinguished civilian of whom you speak was Major Thomson's uncle?"

"I had no idea of it," said Darcy quietly. "I

cannot unsay what I have said, for it is true. But if I had known that, I would not have said it here."

With a sullen scowl and in silence, the Sepoy officer appeared to accept the amends. Shortly afterwards, the party broke up at the usual early Indian hour, and Darcy turned to walk towards the General's quarters with his American acquaintance.

"I should not," he said, "have come to the mess, Mr. Dupont, save for this opportunity of speaking to you in private. What I say I must beg you not to repeat as coming from me, for it is a subject of bitter discussion here. Of course I don't expect you to take my assurance; but ask Evans or Vane, or almost any one but a military officer of the Company, and they will tell you that we are on the verge of a general mutiny of the Sepoy Army in Bengal. If this happens, and it may happen at any moment, the life of no white man, the honour of no white woman, will be safe for an hour outside Calcutta; and if it be not an impertinence to advise you, I would give much to know that you and your daughters were there, or better at sea, before next week is out."

"But in such a case," said the American, "what will be your fate and that of the few Europeans here, and in the hundred other stations where from twenty to four hundred white men are at the mercy of strong Sepoy garrisons?"

"Massacre and reconquest," replied Darcy quietly. "But, for our women, those among us who are not blind are agonized with fear; and you who have no ties, no duties here, why should you remain a day longer than you can help? I should be glad if I

were now bidding you good-bye and leaving with you my last compliments to your daughters."

"I have heard enough," Dupont rejoined, in a troubled tone, "to guess that there is grave foundation for your fears, even if they be exaggerated. And, as you say, there is no reason why my daughters should run risk so terrible. Possibly we may not meet again here. If not, let me thank you for my life, and beg you if possible to let me repeat the expression of my gratitude in my own home."

"What else could a man have done?" answered Darcy. "Pray drop that subject, and believe that any English officer would have tried, if he had not been so good a marksman as practice has rendered me, or so fortunate as, by what was certainly a chance, I proved."

CHAPTER III.

ON THE VERGE.

“Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet.”

“No, Zela, I am in no hurry to-day. As a Catholic, I don't attend the Church parade; and our own priest only visits this station on the first Sunday of each month. He was here last week; and I don't care to go back to my bungalow till the society of the station is safe at home, discussing tiffin and the Chaplain's sermon.”

Rude, and poor in every way, the room in which the speaker was seated, his fair pupil leaning on the back of his rough chair, showed signs both of Indian and European civilization. It had been the principal room of an English bungalow, now much dilapidated, and was built in the usual Anglo-Indian fashion. The worn carpets of Indian make and arrangement had once been handsome and valuable; the table and two or three chairs were such as might some twenty years before have been the rough furniture of a subaltern's habitation. On the former were scattered a few English books, one or two of them, by their elaborate

binding, evidently school prizes, the rest such lesson-books as might be picked up at an out-of-the-way station in the Mofussil. The handwriting of the exercises that lay before Darcy was distinctly childish, that of a decently educated English girl of ten; and if an observer long familiar with the various Indian races might have guessed that the pupil whose long hair brushed her young teacher's shoulder as he spoke was no longer what Indian custom would call a child, the simple expression or want of expression in her face, her manner, attitude, and even, to a European eye, the outlines of her slender form, were thoroughly childlike. Perhaps her dress, leaving neck, arms, and ankles bare, the feet covered only by the slippers peculiar to Native costume, contributed to this impression. Aware of a dislike, which her friend was not conscious that he had ever expressed, for Native habits and such indications of Native taste in the attire of his half-English pupil, Zela, probably with some reluctance, had discarded at least in his presence the silver bracelets and anklets which, despite their poverty, the family still boasted to a greater value than that of the plate retained by an impoverished English household of ten times their means.

"You will tell me, then, more about the tiger," the girl replied. "The Soubahdar-Major's wife was here last night, and she told my mother that all the Sepoys are talking about it; and saying that no other sahib, no shikaree however daring and experienced, would have ventured on such a deed. I suppose Afzul Khan had told them the story, for

they say that he was one of the bravest men in the battalion; and he said no bribe would have induced him to do it. Don't, pray don't, do such a thing again."

"Not if I can help it, Zela. I am as well aware how mere a chance was my escape as Major Thomson, who sneered at it as the most foolish piece of ignorant rashness ever heard of. Of course, though I am a pretty good shot, the chances were at least five to one that I missed, and if I missed . . ."

"Ah!" said Zela, shivering, "don't talk of that. But if you knew the danger so well, why did you do it? How could you help being frightened to death?"

"I did not help it. I don't pretend to that love of danger for its own sake which would have made such an encounter delightful to some of my young comrades. If I could have got away quietly, I certainly should. But, as I told you, the tiger had got a man down and would have torn him to pieces in another minute; and of course I could not run away and leave him."

"Why not?" asked Zela. "Major Thomson at least would have done so, or he could not call you foolish; and all the men say that no one else would have done as you did."

"Men who know they are fearless," said Darcy, somewhat reluctantly, "may afford to run away; though I hardly think any English gentleman could have left a fellow-creature in such straits without feeling bitter shame in the remembrance for the rest of his life. I know that I am afraid of death and

pain; and for that reason I made up my mind long ago that I must never run away from danger. A man has not time, when the danger comes, to think whether he has a right to shirk it; and if he is timid by nature, he is sure to run when he ought not and to disgrace himself, unless he has laid down a rule for himself beforehand."

Unconsciously, the young soldier spoke to relieve his own mind, by uttering to one with whom the secret was safe what he could not have spoken in any other ear, rather than with any belief that Zela would understand his words. More than half his meaning was lost on her, but the rest was intelligible even to her childish mind.

"It must be braver," she said, "to conquer fear than not to be afraid; but if you had been much afraid you would hardly have shot so straight and steadily."

"I practised for years to be able to do so; and, fortunately, I had not much time to be frightened. But never in my life did I feel such a sinking of the heart, such a disposition to tremble, as when I was walking up to the beast, trying to get as near as possible before he should observe me, and knowing that if he caught sight of me ten seconds too soon, or if my first shot missed, I should feel his claws and teeth in my flesh in the next moment. Besides," he added, more lightly, "the young ladies you saw with me on Friday were almost within sight. It was their father that was under the tiger; and you would hardly have had me run away under a lady's eyes?"

“Ah, I understand!” Zela said, half sadly, half angrily. “I wonder they did not ask for the skin.”

“They did, Zela. But do you forget that you made me promise you the first I shot?”

“Forget? No, indeed! But I could never have thought you would remember that when *she* wanted it.”

If there were a shade of something deeper than merely childish jealousy in this little outbreak, yet to Darcy—to whom on their first acquaintance she had seemed as infantine as an English girl of the same age, and for whom she still remained what she had been a year before—the words expressed no more than that resentment of rival claims so common to her sex in their very babyhood. He answered with a smile, patting the little hand that lay on the table—

“‘She,’ Zela, is a chance acquaintance whom I saw for the first time that day, and have seen, I fancy, for the last time. It would have been odd if, to please a stranger, I had vexed my pupil of the last year, to say nothing of breaking my word.”

“You won’t see her again?” said Zela. “Is that true? Have they left the station?”

“No. I meant to have called at the General’s last night, but I had not time; and if, as I hope, they go to-morrow, since I am on duty this afternoon and evening, I shall hardly have a chance to take leave.”

“And you came here when you might have gone there this morning? Ah, you are kinder to me than I thought;” and, as she leaned on his chair, she bent forward and kissed him with the frank impulsive warmth of a penitent child. By contradiction, pro-

bably, rather than confirmation—he could not have told which—the unwonted caress reminded Darcy of the slanders of which he had so lately heard. That recollection gave a slight and wholly involuntary coldness to his tone as next moment he changed somewhat abruptly the subject and spirit of the conversation.

“Now, Zela, let us finish our lessons, and let me hear the verses you were to have learnt by this morning. And don’t lounge, child; you never get on so well in that way.”

Zela sprang up into the attitude in which, like many an English child, she was accustomed to repeat a lesson learnt by rote, standing erect with her hands behind her. But the expressive fire in her eyes, the quick flush on her cheek, contradicted the prompt obedience and indicated the mortification suggestive of incipient self-consciousness. Always wont, however, to comply implicitly with every wish of her tutor, she repeated the lines required, though in a somewhat careless or absent manner. When she had done—

“You would not,” she said, “have told that young lady to stand up.”

“Sit down, then, in future,” he answered, laughing. “It was your mother, not I, who taught you to stand. And—Miss Dupont is not my pupil, Zela. Besides . . .”

“You were going to say she would not have leaned on your chair as I did,” answered Zela, sharply. “I won’t do it again.”

“Must I repeat, Zela, that the young lady you

mean is not my pupil, and only a very slight acquaintance? And, moreover, she is not a child."

"And I am, of course," said Zela; "though, if she had not been English, I should have said she was not older than I."

The slight flush upon Darcy's cheek, and the compression of his lip, betrayed an annoyance which might not have been visible to eyes less quick and less intent than those of his companion.

"Perhaps," he said, quietly, "you are, or fancy yourself, no longer child enough to be my pupil. I have been thinking so, Zela, lately; and, though I shall be sorry to give up a task that has been pleasant, as I hope it has done you some little good . . ."

"You are tired of me," cried the girl, impetuously, interrupting his somewhat hesitating speech. "Well, it is no wonder you are weary of teaching day after day for so many months one who had no claim upon your kindness. But if you give me up so soon, I wish you had never come here."

"Will you make me wish it too, Zela? Perhaps you are right, but I meant kindly by you."

"You don't mean it?" sobbed Zela, throwing herself on her knees, and looking up eagerly into his face. "You will not part with your pupil for one petulant word, one fit of passion, when you have forgiven so many, and done so much to cure them? No! punish me as you please, but do forgive me; do not say you will not teach me any more!"

Darcy's reply was intercepted by another voice; and, turning, he saw that a third person had entered the room. She was an Indian woman in the usual

native costume, but only half-veiled; by face and figure perhaps thirty, but, like most Native women, more worn and aged than many an English matron in her fifth decennium. The young soldier rose, saluting her as formally and respectfully as he would the wife of his Colonel.

“Zela is vexing you again, Lieutenant sahib,” she said, in good English but with a decided accent. “She is always passionate and troublesome, and she abuses your gentleness because she fancies she may do as she pleases with you. Go in, child,” turning to her daughter, and speaking in Hindoostanee. “How many times have I told you that you should bear yourself toward the sahib as a slave to her master? that the temper that makes trouble enough behind the curtain will ruin us if it offends him? Go in; you shall learn to obey me this time, if you have no respect for him whose salt you eat.”

The language was perfectly intelligible to Darcy, but the mother spoke so rapidly that it was impossible to interpose a word in the daughter’s behalf; and ere she ended, driving Zela before her through the entrance leading to her private apartments, his attention had been diverted so that he scarcely heard and did not heed the last words.

“Pardon me, Ranee,” he said, “and do not scold Zela till I return. Afzul has just opened the gate, and he would hardly come here without some urgent message for me.”

He crossed the threshold as he spoke, and met his servant at the gate with a quickness that argued the expectation of tidings anxiously or eagerly awaited.

But the calm, unconscious expression of the Arab's countenance dispelled the alarm, if it were alarm, that his unexpected appearance had excited.

“Clay sahib sent me to find you, sahib,” he said. “The strange ladies came just now to your bungalow and asked for you. The Cornet sahib saw them and they spoke of the tiger-skin. They had heard of the skull, and the elder young lady asked to see it. The Cornet said he was sure you would be glad to give it her, as you had not promised that. But she would not take it from him, and at last he put it in her *palkee*, and told me to find you and tell you they would wait a few minutes at the meeting of the roads to say good-bye to you.”

“I am glad they are going,” said Darcy, hastily, quickening his steps in the direction indicated. When he reached the rendezvous, the litter in which the two girls were conveyed by four strong Native bearers, four others following to relieve them in turn, had paused under the shade of a grove. Their father, and the Brigadier who had accompanied them thus far on the way, had reined up their horses a little further on. The curtains on the shady side of the litter were drawn apart; and as Darcy came up, he saw that Eva, on the further side, was playing with the skull on her lap, while Florence, leaning on one elbow, frankly held out her other hand to him.

“I am very sorry to say good-bye so suddenly and so shortly, Mr. Darcy. Your companion assured me you could spare me the skull, though you could not give us the skin, of the brute that but for you would have made us so miserable to-day; but I could not take it

except from yourself. It is too bad to deprive you of the last trophy of an exploit which seems to be the talk and the admiration of all the cantonment; but . . .”

“Trophies,” replied Darcy, smiling, “in the old days were valued only that they might be laid at a lady’s feet. I should have entreated you to accept the skull had I dreamed you would care to possess it; and, once more, forgive me that I could not offer you the skin.”

“Remember, then,” answered Florence, “that I keep and treasure the skull as a token of kindness from you and a memorial of what we owe you. Write to me sometimes, while you remember our visit, and let us feel that you have not forgotten those who can never forget you.”

“May I?” said Darcy, earnestly; “and may I hope that you will answer? And, in return for the skull, since you value it enough to ask for it, may I ask something from you in memory of the pleasantest days in my Indian life?”

“What can I give?” inquired the girl, simply. “I wish you had asked on Friday, before we had packed everything.”

Still holding her small hand, asking permission by a look that met no sign of refusal and by a graceful and courtly inclination, Darcy unfastened and drew off the young girl’s white glove. Eva laughed out frankly, but there were pleasure and pride rather than amusement in her sister’s face as, colouring slightly, she pressed for the last time the fingers that held her gift. Her father now rode up.

“We have no time to lose, Florence, and your bearers must go on. Mr. Darcy, correspondence is a poor way of keeping friendship alive; but in default of better, let us hear from you from time to time and know how the world goes with you; and whenever you visit the States, remember your promise that we shall see you again.”

The young officer stood still for some minutes, following the departing litter with somewhat wistful eyes. When a turn of the road hid it from his sight, he turned and walked slowly back to the half-ruinous bungalow he had just left. The Ranee was alone in the sitting-room, and greeted him with a certain embarrassment of manner.

“Forgive that foolish child, Darcy sahib,” was her first word. “You know she is passionate and petulant; and your indulgence has spoilt her, as her father used to say.”

“Indeed, Ranee, Zela is nowise in fault. It was I who had vexed her by suggesting that it might be time to discontinue the lessons that have been a pleasure, I hope, to both of us.”

The Indian did not seem to understand.

“If you are tired of them,” she said, “and it is no wonder, let me thank you for all the trouble you have taken with the child; but indeed I think she will break her heart to lose them. But I had something more to say, though I am half afraid to say it. You will swear to me that you will repeat it to no one, for I should not dare to say it to any but you.”

“I will repeat no word of yours, Ranee, without your permission. But don’t tell me what perhaps

ought to be known to others, if I must keep it to myself."

"You must be silent. It might cost my life, but it may save yours. Lieutenant sahib, many of our people remember my father's house, though, except yourself, all yours have forgotten the name of those they ruined. I hear what you would never hear, what no Englishman would be allowed to know. What is going on among your soldiers you may find out for yourself. But not only among your soldiers, but among all the people of this country—all of them warriors till you conquered us, most of them attached to princes and nobles whom you have ruined, or whom, if you have left them their estates, you have condemned to loiter indoors, to play with their women, or watch the dancing girls, or at best to find employment in making war only on beasts and birds—the Company's *raj* is hated, and hated in the belief that it will fall this year. Sahib, the mine has been charged long ago; but now the train is ready, and the match may be lit to-morrow. Then, the whole country will be up; and your squadron will be alone, like a single house in a flood that sweeps suddenly by night over a whole plain, without friend or help within two hundred miles."

"I need not repeat a word of this, Ranee. There is nothing in what you tell me that half of our people have not known for many weeks past; and those who will not know it have been told it often and in vain. You can help me only if you can tell me when and by whom the match will be lighted."

The woman looked carefully around her as he ended,

and then, drawing close to him, spoke in a nervous hurried whisper in English, her previous sentences having been uttered in her own tongue.

“Among all your Native troops here only some fifty Sikhs might be trusted, if they loved their leader. But if the regiment rise, or if it is treated as others have been, they will be swept away with the stream. When? I cannot tell; but to-day or to-morrow—I mean, very soon. There is a Court-Martial at Meerut we hear of even here, and they say the Mussulman troopers will not let their comrades be punished for a fault common to all.”

“If that be the signal,” said Darcy, “it *will* be to-day or to-morrow. I thank you, Ranee, and I say what may be good-bye. Say it for me to Zela.”

“No, wait and say it yourself. I could not keep her quiet if you went without seeing her, and she thought you would not return soon.”

She turned, and hastily vanished behind the curtain that parted the inner from the outer rooms of her small and, to European eyes, wretched dwelling. As Darcy moved towards the outer door, his mind full of the warning just given, a sudden touch on his arm arrested his departure and turned his eyes on Zela, whose light footfall he had not heard. Her eyes were swollen and tearful, her face flushed, her breast heaving with sobs; and it was with some difficulty that she found her voice.

“I have not been so ungrateful as I seemed for the kindness I knew, sahib,” she faltered.

He interrupted her, laying his hand gently on her long black tresses.

“You forget, Zela! I had trouble enough to unteach you that word.”

He spoke lightly, but Zela's passionate earnestness was not to be so diverted.

“I have been grateful, if I have not seemed so, for all your patience and care in teaching me,” she said; “in trying to make me, a poor half-caste, what you call a lady. But you must have thought me ungrateful indeed, if you supposed I knew all I owed to you. It is only in these few minutes I have learned, what I never dreamed before, that my father left us penniless, and that we have owed even our bread and our home to your charity.”

“I never meant you should know, Zela. You could not understand what claims the widow and child of an English soldier have upon a comrade—how much a gentleman must feel for the descendants of a ruined gentleman. Help given to women in right of such claims is not charity, nor can you understand how little it cost me.”

There was, however, in the girl's countenance an expression of humiliation that rendered the gratitude with which it mingled intensely painful to a nature like Darcy's. So to explain matters as to relieve this feeling was for the moment his sole thought, and the task was no easy one.

“You would understand easily, Zela, that a brother or kinsman would care, could not help caring, for an unprovided widow and orphan; and, long since, I have learnt to feel for you and for your mother as keenly and warmly as a brother would do. And again, I hope that the Governor-General will be induced to

reconsider your grandfather's case, and redress the wrong that was done him. Then your mother can and will of course, repay me; and in the mean time what I have lent is of little account."

"It is generous, it is kind in you to say so. It is like you as you have always been to me," murmured Zela. "But, child as I am, I know better. I understand the excuse you make to yourself and to us. Only, Mr. Darcy, if you are not brother or kinsman, I love you as well as any sister—yes, even your English sister—could love; and, while it pains me to know how much we owe to one on whom we have no claim, I am glad to learn how much reason and right I have to love you."

Her last words were spoken almost in a whisper; and, deeply moved, the young soldier stooped and kissed the tears from her upturned eyes. Then, with no such word of farewell as he had intended, but with a long and earnest pressure of her hand, he left the house. Zela's eyes followed his form till, at some little distance down the road, she saw him mount the horse held by his servant, and ride towards the cantonment.

CHAPTER IV.

FIRE.

“Is yon red glare the Western Star?
Oh, ’tis the beacon-blaze of War!”

ABOUT noon on the next day, Clay and Evans sat or lounged, smoking the huge cheroots in especial favour with Anglo-Indians, in the verandah of the cottage occupied in common by the former and Darcy.

“Well,” said the journalist, “I am afraid I shall have to start without seeing your chum, and I am sorry for it. If the road were less perilous than I think it is at present, I should not of course start in the heat of the day. But I have no time to lose. An old friend of my father’s has offered me what I have long coveted, the editorship of a London daily; and though as yet neither the position of the paper nor the salary is much worth having, I rely on my power to improve both. Tell Darcy, if I don’t see him, to send me anything and everything he cares to write about the course of things here, and to write in the simple straightforward style of the papers I published in the *Mofussil Newsman*. He is about the only youngster I ever knew who writes much as he speaks, without fine phrases or long Latin words. What

induced him to take up a profession that don't pay, and into which very few men of his cultivation and literary taste care to enter? Certainly he has the making of a good journalist, and is thrown away in the Army."

"Pretty complimentary to the service!" retorted the youth. "Then it needs intellect to write history, but fools will do to make it?"

"The Army has as much need of brains as any profession you can name. But the Queen's service don't reward or use them, and therefore don't often get them; and when the Company finds an officer with more than are needed to give the word of command correctly in Hindoostanee, it takes him from his regiment and sends him to a petty Native Court, or to do joint-magistrate's duty at some fourth-rate station in the Non-Regulation Provinces."

"Hallo!" said Clay, "there is Darcy, and," as his friend came nearer, "something has put him out, and it takes a little to do that. Oh yes; his face is quiet enough, but look at the cane he switches! When he does that, he would dearly like to lay it over somebody's back. Evans, I'll bet five rupees that he would give five hundred just now for the pleasure of making it acquainted with Thomson's shoulders."

"If Darcy don't take care, and if his friends are not wiser than you, that man will be his ruin. He keeps his temper well enough under most provocations; but if Thomson finds out his weakness he will drive him easily into some unpardonable offence against military rule and discipline. Your friend has all the passion and the principles of his ancestors,

though he may not have, or may not show yet, their love of peril and adventure for its own sake. If he received an affront that touched him on the point of honour, he would resent it on the parade ground at the cost of his commission and his career."

The person of whom they spoke now joined them, suppressing as he became conscious of it that sharp angry movement of his switch which the experience of eighteen months had taught his chum to regard as the only sure sign of bitter irritation or hardly repressed temper. He had greeted Evans and sat without speaking for some minutes, when the latter repeated the request he had entrusted to Clay.

"There will be enough to write about," returned Darcy, "if there are English pens to write it, before a week is out. I shall be glad to hear, if I have ears to hear it or eyes to read by that time, that you have reached Calcutta safely. And I would give both to know that Dupont and his daughters were there unhurt."

"Where have you been, Darcy?" said his comrade, after a pause.

"With the Brigadier," was the reply. "He desired me to call on him, half formally, half as if asking me to tiffin."

"He might have put it off till the cool of the evening," said Clay, loosening the light cotton jacket he wore, and visibly perspiring even in the shade, despite the luxurious lightness of his attire. "To wear uniform for a couple of hours in this sun is a worse punishment than a week's arrest in England; and something or other has made you tolerably hot. The

old fellow is good-natured enough, and you are not given to scrapes; what has 'riled you,' as Dupont would say?"

"What always riles a soldier and a gentleman," replied Darcy, something in the studiously measured utterance belying the usual quiet tone; "lies, and lies touching others as well as myself."

"I can guess who has been backbiting you, then. I offered to bet Evans that you would give five hundred rupees to thrash the fellow."

"If we both live," said Darcy, "I expect I shall try one of these days."

"And it will cost you more," interposed Evans, "than five hundred thousand. If you let that man provoke you to any act or word of intemperate violence, Darcy, you will not only ruin your own career, but give him precisely the revenge he desires. If you lose your temper with him you are only playing his game; and he would not grudge a few horsewhip cuts to know that he had ruined the future of one of the most promising subalterns in the Queen's service."

"Very likely," said Darcy. "I shan't meddle with him if I can help it. But there are some things a man must not bear. The General spoke very guardedly and courteously: I might say like a father, if slang had not made the phrase ambiguous. He said that he had been warned that the Ranee was a dangerous person, false to the English rule, and at least as mischievous as an Indian woman can be. I told him that whoever gave him that warning had sinister motives for it; that, though I spoke in French, I dared only tell him that she had risked life to

tell me—what we know, but what he affects still to disbelieve. Then he said that whether I were right or not, the days were gone by when English officers could follow Indian usages, and that a Native mistress was a fatal obstacle to a young man's career, unless the matter were kept as dark as in England. My blood boiled as I asked him who had put such a slander into his mind. Of course he would not tell me; and I said that the author of the insinuation was a liar and a scoundrel, and that I had treated the Ranee and her daughter as I would treat an elder sister and niece of my own. Now, Evans, I might and would shut my eyes and ears to anything that only touched myself; but I cannot pass over calumnies against a helpless, friendless girl, when I know the liar's name and all the station knows that I know it, without dishonouring myself."

"You are not bound," replied his friend, "and you have scarcely a right, to take up her quarrel; and, moreover, you will do her more harm than good by making her the subject of a public scene and perhaps a military scandal."

"I may not have the right to be her champion," rejoined the soldier, "though, as her mother's only friend in the station, I think no one would seriously deny it to me. But the charge against me is one of deliberate dishonour. The girl, I take it, is a mere child. At any rate, I always supposed her so. But certainly she is such a child that to take advantage of her mother's confidence and my own influence with her would be a villany almost as vile as the seduction of a relative under one's own roof; and he who im-

putes such a thing falsely is as great a scoundrel as he who would do it. But don't be afraid. I hope to brand the offender as a liar before the whole station, without doing anything of which a Court-Martial could take cognizance."

"Remember," repeated his elder friend, "that if you say or do anything that can be used against you, you are simply playing into your enemy's hand, and probably injuring your friends almost as much as yourself."

Darcy made no reply, and, though very uneasy as to the probable consequences of his impetuosity, his Mentor was forced to let the subject drop. Indeed, he had time for very few more words before his Native servant came to warn him that the hour fixed for his departure had arrived.

Late that evening, the German Count von Arnheim occupied the journalist's place with the two friends in their verandah; the outer mats drawn down to keep out the bats and other flying creatures attracted by the lamp within.

"You are right, Darcy. You English, as a conquering race, have the same insolent contempt for the feelings of the conquered that every Power save Rome has shown, and that has in the end been fatal to the ascendancy of most conquering races and of more than one great aristocracy. Your people, especially youngsters, are ignorant enough to speak of Aryans, men of our own race, men whose chiefs have all the pride and sensitiveness of a European nobility, as 'niggers'; and their folly is equal to their ignorance. A month ago, I was the guest of the

Rajah of Kulwar, one of the proudest, the noblest, and the most influential chiefs of the North-West; a man of pure Rajpoot family, that is to say of unmixed Aryan blood and of nearer kindred to us than Jews, Hungarians, or Russians. He was at first somewhat reserved with me; and at last, as we became better friends, expressed, almost in so many words, his surprise and satisfaction that a European, even as his guest, treated him as a gentleman and an equal. He understands English as well as I, if he do not care to speak it; and he told me with bitter resentment how on one occasion, in this very station, when a guest of its commanding officer, he had heard repeated inquiries why that 'nigger' was of the party; and that only one English officer showed disgust and indignation at the affront, and endeavoured to atone it by marked courtesy to him. The gratitude and regard he expressed for that one young officer showed how few of your comrades have common sense or, forgive me if I say, common good-breeding in such matters. These follies have made an enemy of one who, if he used his whole influence against you, could probably turn the scale hereabouts. Kulwar is unique; a feudal fortress on a European scale, such as is hardly to be found elsewhere in India, and the Rajah's force, though small, is of first-rate quality. Besides these, he could arm some thousands of irregular warriors; while, had you made him your friend, he could have kept quiet under almost any excitement a country as large as Hanover, for half the Native Princes would probably follow his lead."

“A very dangerous enemy,” Darcy replied, “but I am afraid in no case a very powerful friend. I believe that if by possibility he should declare in our favour, three-fourths at least of his own people would desert him; nay, I doubt whether he could depend on any but his own *baba-logue*, his children, the retainers of his own household. I wish rather than hope that Kavanagh, who is an able and reputed a courageous man, may keep that country quiet. If not—excuse me for one minute.”

He had caught sight of his Native servant, who had passed through the verandah into the sitting-room, with a slight sign to him unobserved by the others.

“What is it, Afzul?” asked Darcy in a quick low tone.

“The Third have risen, sahib, and released the prisoners sent to gaol by the Court-Martial. All the Native troops at Meerut are up; the sahibs have been cut to pieces, and the whole force, after burning the station, is on its way, they say, to Delhi.”

“If that is true—if they have the sense to make for that centre, to proclaim the old Imperial house, and if they get there—we have our work cut out for us. Is this certain, Afzul?”

“The story is all through the lines, sahib; though if I had not told you the officers would not know it till to-morrow at earliest. I have told you how often and how surely Native news is transmitted when your telegraphs are cut and your couriers fail you.”

“Do you know what the Sepoys here intend?”

“No, sahib; and they don’t know themselves.

But, except the Sikhs, who are only about fifty, they are all ripe for mutiny; and when they mutiny they will not leave a European alive in the station if they can help it."

"See my horse saddled, then, at once, and bring him round."

Re-entering the verandah, Darcy communicated in even fewer words than Afzul had used the substance of the report.

"Don't talk of it at present," he said; "I must carry the news at once to the Brigadier, though I know I shall only get snubbed for my pains."

An hour had passed, and most of the lights in the European dwellings were extinguished, when he returned.

"Halbert thinks more of it than he will own. I have also told Vane; but I don't see that *we* can do anything. In the present temper of the authorities, we shall wait of course till the Sepoys actually rise, and they will choose their own time to cut our throats with most certainty and surest impunity."

"I don't know that," said Vane, who now entered the verandah. "There has been a want of sense and concert in the conduct of those regiments in which partial outbreaks have already taken place that does not look like preparation or prearrangement; and it seems that even the Third mutinied on a special provocation, and were followed by the rest of the troops at Meerut, if your story be correct."

"True," replied Darcy. "All I have heard leads me to believe that there is quite as much of panic as of treason in the Army. Well, if they know their

own intentions, if this is a conspiracy extending to all the disaffected regiments in Bengal and the North-West, there will hardly be a European left alive this day month. If not, if it be a fire spreading by chance to combustible material, and our chiefs will but be on their guard and recognize notorious facts, surely we may hold our own till reinforcements bring us strength for reconquest? ”

“If we can depend only on our Europeans,” said Vane, “the thing looks as black as it well can. Countries half as large as France are guarded only by seven or eight hundred English soldiers. God help our women ! ”

The men sat in grave silence for the next quarter of an hour, when the German, familiar by long and varied experience with every form of danger, rose, and approaching one of the blinds, raised it and looked out. His practised eye had caught a peculiar effect of the light, as if the illumination from the lamp within were counteracted by a stronger illumination from without.

“Darcy, there is a fire, and a large one! Where is it? ”

They all sprang to their feet and hastened to join the Count.

“In the Native lines,” said Darcy, quietly. “No, it is not a large one; it is the burning of two or three huts at most. They have blazed up fiercely, from their light dry material, and even now the fire is subsiding. If it do not spread, it will be a sign, I suppose, of excitement and disaffection rather than a signal for actual rising? ”

“Probably,” answered Vane. “There have been fires of that kind in every station of late. Well, I shall go down and turn out the guard, and see that our men are not butchered in their sleep if there should be a rising. Von Arnheim, will you go with me?”

“Thank you, no,” said the German. “I will stay here for the night, if you will permit me. I suppose we shall hear your trumpet if there is an alarm, and in that case I will join you, if we are not intercepted. If Mr. Darcy can lend me a sword—I have used one to some purpose before now.”

But for the urgency of the experienced German traveller and soldier, none of the trio would have slept that night. His cool practical sense insisted that, to be fresh for possible danger and probable active work in the morning, they should watch and sleep by turns. No further incident occurred, however; during the night; and early on the following day came assured tidings of the outbreak at Meerut.

“It is inexplicable,” said Vane to the party assembled in the mess-room after the midday meal. “There is at Meerut a whole cavalry regiment of the Queen’s and a troop of Horse Artillery, and yet the mutineers seem to have had their own way from the first within the station, and after burning it have gone off towards Delhi—it would actually seem unpursued; but *that* is impossible.”

It proved, however, too true. The news that poured in day after day at Sivapore is now matter of history which it is needless to repeat. Station after station was in flames, regiment after regiment

mutinied against officers who could do nothing but wait and watch ; afraid to take precautions, even for the safety of their women and children, lest they should precipitate a peril which many of them would not believe, till taught by fatal experience, could menace the fidelity of their own men.

Fires at Sivapore were of nightly occurrence, chiefly in the Native lines ; but one or two European dwellings had been burnt—without loss of life, however, as all were on the alert against such incidents. The officers of the Lancers, with Vane, were assembled in his verandah one evening, when the flames shot up in a new and unexpected direction.

“Thomson’s bungalow, by God!” cried Vane, springing to his feet.

“Naturally,” said another. “I only wonder this has not happened before. Few Sepoy officers are so hated by their men.”

“Clay,” said Vane, “run over to Captain Everett, and ask him from me whether he will attempt to turn out the Sikhs and the Sikhs alone. If he can do so, we may, by showing such special confidence in them, detach them from the rest and be able to trust them hereafter. If he cannot, do not let him bring any Native soldiers. We can manage the fire ourselves.”

The party hurried down to the scene of conflagration. The whole building was now in flames, and on this occasion the danger to life was great. The Major’s family were with him, and his children slept in inner rooms, access to which was cut off by the fire. Most of the officers present, wearing not their uniform but light cool costumes suited to the climate,

were ill fitted to encounter flames which would at once have caught and consumed their clothes. More than one had been severely burnt, when Darcy, who had been on duty till late and was still in uniform, learnt from the terrified Native servants that two little girls were still in the blazing bungalow. Perfectly cool amid the panic and confusion, he had exercised over the dismayed and confounded servants a control which the eager excitement of his comrades and their ignorance of the language rendered impossible to them; and had obtained in a few words such local directions as showed him the nearest way to the room in which, if still alive, the little victims would be found. Looking around, he observed among the numberless articles that had been hastily dragged from the nearer rooms a large blanket, and wrapping this around his head he plunged daringly amid the soaring flames; choosing, however, the windward side of the building, where the heat had fanned into a breeze of some force the light moving air of the evening. There was no staircase to fall, no doors of European strength and with European locks to be forced open. But the light materials of the building, though much more solid than those of the Native huts, fed the conflagration with fatal rapidity; and almost the whole dwelling was a mass of fire. Fortunately, for the same reason, there was comparatively little smoke; the rescuers instinctively directing the little water they could command on that part of the building where the flames were hottest and where of necessity it produced least effect. The children were of course awake as, his hair alight, his

face and hands badly scorched already, the young soldier reached their room. Too terrified and too exhausted to scream longer, they crouched in the centre of the floor, and had by instinct covered themselves as they clung together with the one article that could best protect them, though but for a few moments,—a soft feather-bed which their mother's English fancies had placed beneath the cooler mattress of straw already consumed. To carry them safely in their thin cotton night-dresses through the flames would have been impossible; but, lifting one on either arm, Darcy, in a cool, matter-of-fact tone, which for the moment overcame her terror, directed the elder to wrap around both the blanket he had brought, and which of course, thus encumbered, he could not himself arrange. The peril of the little girls had now become known to all outside, and their mother, half mad with distress and terror, was hardly restrained from an attempt which only could have been fatal to her without the slightest possibility that she could have reached, much less rescued, her children. More than one officer had made a desperate attempt to enter the blazing building, not half a minute after Darcy had unobserved plunged therein; but not exercising the same cool judgment, and attempting to force an entrance at the nearest point, they had been beaten back by the flames, all badly scorched, one with his clothes burnt off and so injured as to be all but insensible. To force an exit, even by the way he had entered, with such a burden as Darcy's was beyond his power. Before he had traversed half the short distance that parted the children's nursery from

the open air, the roof fell in around him, and, beaten down on his knee, he gave up hope of life for himself and his charge. Still struggling to the last, however, he had staggered up and was instinctively seeking the least impracticable course, when both the girls were hastily snatched from his embrace, and he himself, now blind and fainting, was grasped by two pair of strong Native arms and hurried over the burning embers. Laid down outside at some little distance from the flames, and the crowd that still gathered round them, he revived as he felt the fresh evening air. Unable to see, he yet recognized the voice of Afzul, who held his head on his knee and was persuading him to open his mouth for the draught of brandy which the strictly abstinent Mahometan had with unusual good sense snatched up when, guessing that his master would be among the first in the scene of peril, he had induced half a dozen Native associates to follow and assist him; easily enlisting their aid for one, among the younger officers at least, the most liked or least hated by the Native soldiery and populace.

The regimental surgeon had departed after dressing Darcy's injuries the next morning, and he was left alone with the companion of his bungalow, when the latter inquired—

“What took you into the fire at that last moment, Darcy?”

“Is every one safe?” the invalid answered in a faint voice.

“Yes,” replied Clay. “The little girls, they say, were in the building when the roof fell; but half a

dozen Natives, of whom Afzul seems to have been one, rushed in and dragged them out. How they came out alive and unburnt in their light night-dresses one can hardly guess. Except that the youngest looks a comical object with her fair curls burnt off, they are not injured."

As he spoke, Afzul had entered the room, bringing lemonade to quench the burning thirst inseparable from the fever attendant on such injuries as his master's in such a climate.

"No, Cornet sahib," he said. "I should have grudged giving my life for the Major sahib's sake, or any that belonged to him."

"Shame on you, Afzul!" interposed his master. "No soldier like you—no son of the Koreish, the best blood in Arabia—whatever his injuries, could have wished to see them revenged on harmless children."

"The sons of Ishmael have visited the sins of the fathers upon the children ever since our father was driven from the tent of El-Khalil," replied the Native, a dark vindictive look clouding his really noble features. "It was to bring you out, sahib, not the children, that I went in, and it was for you only that my brethren would have followed me. As if you had not good cause to hate the man for whose house you would have given your life if we had been a moment later! It was from the Lieutenant sahib's arms we took the children, Cornet. It was he who had wrapped the blanket round them that saved them from the fire, when no other man was cool enough to think even of the best way in or out of the flames."

"A damned queer thing, then," said Clay, indig-

nantly, "that Thomson has not been here yet to thank you or inquire."

"I trust," replied Darcy, "that he knows nothing of the matter. And, Afzul, be silent for the future upon the whole story. And you, Clay, you will not tell what I never meant you to have heard?"

"Are you in earnest?" asked his comrade, somewhat surprised.

"Certainly. And, upon your honour, you will tell nothing?"

"Not without your leave, of course," the youth answered, grudgingly. "But I should like the Major to know what he owes to the man he has spited and slandered ever since you came to the station."

"And I should not," returned Darcy. "I owe him a debt I mean to pay, and I have no wish that it should be cancelled by a chance like this."

Native tongues, however, are not easily silenced. Long before morning the whole story was known throughout the Native lines, and ere nightfall every family in the station, except that which it most concerned, had heard it, though as an ill-authenticated rumour. Clay, bound by his promise to his comrade, was harassed with a hundred inquiries which could only be parried by a deliberate fiction—a total denial of all knowledge of the matter. To the children he had rescued Darcy's face was not familiar; and in the horror and confusion of the moment they might not have recognized it had it been a brother's. To the very few comrades against whose visits the excuse of exhaustion and need of quiet was not a sufficient bar, Darcy himself pleaded his illness and inability to bear

conversation on the subject. This, and yet more his friend's profession of ignorance, served with the greater part of the European society of the station as a disproof of a story which many were unwilling to believe. Several ladies especially were bitterly prejudiced against one who had presumed by act and implication, if not in direct words, to put a Native lady on an equality with themselves, and to manifest more interest in a half-caste child than in their own daughters. In one house, however, there was no shadow of doubt upon the matter. The Ranee had heard an exaggerated account of Darcy's injuries, and the true story of their origin, before the sun rose on the ruins of Major Thomson's bungalow; and all a mother's authority, and all the stringent reserve of an Indian home, were needed to restrain Zela's passionate anxiety to see the hero of an adventure which impressed her even more than that of the tiger, and to learn with her own eyes the state of her one friend. Darcy, however, had thought for her, and, unable to use his right hand, had traced in pencil with the bandaged fingers of the left a line or two which Afzul delivered before noon that day. When, after a few days' confinement, he pronounced himself able, despite the surgeon's remonstrances, to enter a palanquin, he caused the bearers to carry him in the dusk of evening to the Ranee's dwelling. Both his friends received him with a warm and eager welcome; the Ranee with more frankness, more outspoken kindness, than interest and regard alike had hitherto been able to inspire in one who inherited the traditions of Indian womanhood; the daughter with unrestrained, undis-

guised sympathy and affection. But the tears which Zela did not affect to conceal when she saw the maimed and bandaged right arm, the face disfigured by scars and by the loss of eyebrows and lashes, and the burnt hair and moustache—the caressing touch, checked only by fear of hurting the invalid, and the broken words of passionate feeling which accompanied these—seemed to one singularly free from the meaner forms of coxcombry rather the frank expression of childlike fondness than indications of childhood's gratitude ripening into the love of earliest womanhood.

CHAPTER V.

EN ROUTE.

“They ha’ saddled a hundred milk-white steeds,
They ha’ bridled a hundred black ;
Wi’ a chafron o’ steel on each horse’s head
And a gude knight on his back.”

“I wish you had not reported yourself fit for service ; and with your arm still in the sling you had no right to do so, Darcy,” said his commanding officer, a day or two later. “But I understand your feeling, and you are not far out. There may be hot and hard work here at any moment. The Sepoys are not the less dangerously disposed that they are comparatively quiet. The *budmashes*, beggars, *fakirs*, and all the bad characters about, grow more insolent in their manner every day. And there may be a fresh cause of danger. Kavanagh’s wife and daughters are with him, and the Brigadier growls at a hint he has received to send a European escort to bring them away.”

“I don’t wonder he growls,” said Darcy. “Of course their departure will be a signal of alarm and very likely of insurrection there, and the absence of any considerable part of our small force is likely to give the sign for an outbreak here.”

“Just so ; and yet to send only a small escort is to

combine the peril of doing and not doing. But the Earl of Penrith is master just now, and Lady Helen Kavanagh (I knew her at home, and she is certainly 'too good for such a breed') must, I suppose, be made safe at any cost."

"Well, Colonel," observed Darcy, after a pause, "I don't quite see it in that light. Don't you think, with a score of picked troopers, one might do in the way of rescue and escort whatever a squadron could do? If the whole country rises upon us, surely a squadron would be overpowered; and if not, would not a score be sufficient to protect the ladies against a mere gang of robbers or a chance attack?"

His commanding officer pondered for some time in silence, with an anxious and thoughtful face.

"You may be right, Darcy; and at any rate I think we ought rather to run the risk of failing in that quarter than withdraw the greater part of our European force here, with so strong a probability that its departure would be the signal for mutiny and wholesale massacre. If I were Kavanagh, I should hardly think Lady Helen and her daughters safer here than there. We have no tenable position, and the Brigadier will not allow fortifications to be thrown up, holding that they would provoke attack before they could be of service. At any rate I'll talk to him about it. You know the road; would you like the duty? I can't well spare my only Captain."

"Very much, Colonel, especially if you will let me pick my men."

"From your own troop, I might; a score out of sixty—and you are in favour with them."

Very shortly after the Colonel had departed, a Native servant brought to Darcy a note, directed in English, but within written in English indeed, but with Hindoostanee characters; a child's notion of puzzling any intrusive reader.

"My mother has made up her mind," wrote Zela, "to leave Sivapore to-night. She has enemies among the sahibs, and she thinks that from the Mahometans I, as the child of an English father, might not be safe. I may not write where we go. Come if you can before we leave."

"I never asked any one to take duty for me, often as I have taken it for others. I would if Clay were not out to-day; but . . . the route might come at any moment. No, I must write good-bye, and get Afzul to find out where they go. They are just as well away at present."

He had written a line of kind farewell to his pupil, and had been occupied for some two hours over regimental business, when another note was brought; this time from Vane, a mere formal order to report at the latter's bungalow for duty an hour before sunset. But in this note were appended three French words in Greek characters: "*Nommez votre vingtaine.*" Darcy wrote down at once in the same form, but following one another like the words of a letter, and not in column as a regular list, the names of twenty men of his own troop. Precaution was felt to be necessary at this time in every written or spoken communication which might fall under Native eyes or ears.

An hour before the time named, accompanied by Clay, by the German, and two or three other military

friends, Darcy walked down deliberately to a point upon the road where he might expect to meet the commander of the Sepoy battalion with some of his officers returning from duty. He was not disappointed. The men met, and entered into conversation frankly; only the Count suspecting for what purpose the meeting had been contrived. After a few moments' general talk, Darcy spoke in tones very quiet, measured, but clearly audible to all present. His eyes were fixed upon Major Thomson, but he gave no other indication that his words were addressed to any in particular.

“Many of you,” he said, “were present when I was accused of leading young ladies into ‘equivocal company,’ and by insinuation if not directly it was implied that a friendship I greatly value was of a character discreditable to both parties. The same thing has since been hinted elsewhere. I take this opportunity to answer what it has not been thought prudent to say in my presence; to affirm that in every point the insinuation is unfounded, calumnious, and unmanly, and that, should I meet its author where neither of us is restrained by military duty, I will repeat my assertion in clearer and stronger terms.”

All eyes were turned upon the slanderer whom Darcy had indicated but had not named. His face flushed deep red with mingled rage and embarrassment. To take up the gauntlet thrown was to render himself responsible for an untenable charge which even Colonel Vane had treated as imputing personal if not military dishonour. To explain it away was hardly possible, and yet every one present knew per-

fectly well from whose lips the words now denounced as a falsehood had proceeded. At last, with difficulty and in an unsteady voice, he answered—

“Mr. Darcy seems ready to quarrel upon somewhat slight grounds, and yet too cautious to fix an open quarrel upon any one.”

“When I meet the offender where no professional duty qualifies my language, he will not complain of its obscurity,” Darcy retorted contemptuously.

“This is no time for boyish quarrels,” said the Major, with what struggled to be dignity and was simply sulkiness.

Darcy turned on his heel and walked up slowly with the German to the place where he was to receive his expected orders.¹

“It is rumoured,” said Von Arnheim, “that you are to march this evening for Kulwar or its neighbourhood. If so, can you obtain for me leave to accompany you? I could play my part in a skirmish; and from the terms on which I stand with the Rajah, I might possibly be of service.”

“Say that to Vane; and if he permit I shall be heartily glad of your company. I don’t think one place in this part of India is now more dangerous than another. Of course you may get shot if you accompany me; but, staying here, you are almost as likely to have your throat cut before I return. It is a pity you did not leave with Dupont.”

“I have no girls with me,” replied the German, “and there may be work here as well worth seeing as what I have more than once travelled far to see in Europe.”

“Aye ; but here there will be no quarter to prisoners, and no consideration for non-combatants.”

“I shall not be a non-combatant,” returned the traveller, “if there be fighting worth sharing.”

With a grave and somewhat anxious face the commanding officer of the Lancers met his subaltern in the verandah.

“Your selection,” he said, “is surely strange. You have picked out, I think, nearly all the worst characters in your troop, except ——, ——, and ——.”

“Bad characters of a different kind, Colonel. Those three are drunkards ; and drunkards are good for no soldierly duty. The men I have chosen may be insubordinate in quarters from the very same qualities which will make them heroes or desperadoes, as you please, on dangerous service.”

“I hope it may not prove dangerous,” replied the other. “In sending you on such a duty, the Brigadier pays you the highest compliment in his power. I need not tell you how anxiously I shall look to see you justify such a trust not only by courage but by discretion and conduct. Your men are warned, and you will find them ready to mount in the cantonment.”

Darcy saluted without a word, and turned to mount the charger held ready by Afzul. As soon as the rapidly failing twilight of the tropics allowed them to conceal their movements, the little party rode quietly out, Darcy at their head. They had not gone half a mile before the hoof-beats of a horse at full gallop were heard in their rear, and the German reined up at the young officer's side. His travelling

jacket was buttoned up in the fashion of a soldier's tunic; in a leathern belt he carried a large Colt's revolver, and in a leathern scabbard a sword more resembling an Indian tulwar than the blunt heavy sabre of the British trooper.

"You English are not worse than others," he said, "but steel scabbards show how much more tradition has to do with military equipments than common sense. A sword should cut; and swords carried in steel scabbards are sure to be blunted. Cuirass and helmet have their use in cavalry encounters; but why, in the name of common sense, should heavy cavalry have them bright, to reflect the sunlight and betray the wearers from behind cover or at almost any distance to a quick, well-trained reconnoitrer? And your own lances, with pennons and bright steel points; can anything be more absurd?"

"We march by moonlight as much as possible," Darcy replied. "By day—thank you for the hint—I will have the pennons furled."

"You march as light, I suppose, as you can. But Native horsemen, worse mounted, would keep their distance as they pleased, and harass an army of which these are the 'light' cavalry to destruction, without ever coming to close quarters. Well for you that India has not produced a great Native commander, and that the Sikhs were not led by those who drilled them."

"Your arm pains you badly," he observed, some time afterwards; "you will be well-nigh helpless in a skirmish. Those children have cost you dear."

"What children?" asked Darcy, with unwilling equivocation.

“Nay,” returned the German, “I understand your wish to keep the secret ; but don’t affect denial to me. Thomson won’t accept the truth unless it is forced on him. A pity your chivalry could not have been exercised in favour of some one old enough to reward it ! ”

“I don’t agree with you, Count,” said Darcy, pleased with this lighter turn of the conversation. “I am always fond of children, and felt at least as well pleased when the little ones clung so trustfully to me as I should have done if their age had been trebled, and something less perfectly pure and simple had mingled in their confidence.”

“If the story were truly told,” observed the Count, “I venture to prophesy for you a brilliant career as soldier. Plenty of boys would have dared the same : boys are often more fearless than men for mere lack of experience. But comparatively few soldiers fail for sheer want of courage. Coolness in ‘danger is the rare quality that makes a leader of men ; and no other man I know under twenty-five would have remembered at the moment on which side of the fire lay the only chance of rescue ; as almost any other would have fired at the tiger before coming within the distance at which a revolver could be trusted to strike the bull’s-eye. But your arm is evidently very painful.”

“I am ashamed you should see it,” said Darcy ; “but I do not bear pain well. Our surgeon tries to excuse me by saying I suffer more than others ; but I suppose all human flesh is much alike in that way.”

“Nonsense!” the other answered. “Men no more feel pain alike than frogs or fish feel like horses or dogs. A European would die of sheer agony under tortures the Red Indian bears steadily. The finest nervous organizations, men of whom much can be made, who are capable of great things in thought or action, are almost always acutely sensitive to pain as to pleasure. It is the inferior natures that endure easily. Men who can be hired to die as felons for a few pieces of gold flinch, though they be ten to one, before soldiers like yours, who would hold that no price could pay a man for incurring certain death. Military courage really consists, in nine cases out of ten, in a bad estimate of probabilities, and generally in the tenth case in a power to forget the probabilities altogether. Very few but run, unless under furious excitement, when they realize that the chances of life and death are even; and those who will face a *certainty* of death are almost exclusively found among the class to whom, from tradition and training, death is less terrible than dishonour.”

“I suppose,” returned Darcy, “the courage of nearly all thoughtful and susceptible men must rest on that ground. We must halt presently: I wish I saw a secure resting-place. The moon will be down in another half-hour.”

The German’s experience was found of great practical service. He indicated to his friend, whose military knowledge, as yet purely theoretical, left him somewhat at a loss, the ease with which a ruined Native temple might, by placing two sentries, be made a safe shelter for both horses and men, and suggested that the

grain for the former should be boiled, to be the more easily digested before the morning start. The march was of course a forced one : two hundred miles had to be traversed with the utmost possible speed. Marching in the heat of the sun would have knocked up both men and horses ; to move by night, except during the period of moonlight, was impossible, utter darkness closing in shortly after sunset. Within some hours' march of their objective point, Darcy halted his party for rest in a wood of no great extent. They had to depend on the country for forage, moving in the lightest possible order, and carried no other shelter for man or beast than a blanket. This the German taught them to sling on two strong short stakes as a hammock above the dew-soaked ground ; and the men were conscious of more than one considerable alleviation of the hardships of their journey due to the orders suggested by his companion to their young chief.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BURST OF THE THUNDERSTORM.

“Now by the lips of those we love, fair gentlemen of France,
Charge for the golden Lilies! upon them with the lance!”

THE burning heat of the sun was beginning to be felt, and would have tried the endurance of the party after their long and exhausting march more severely but for the precaution which had substituted a morning draught of coffee for their favourite spirits, when Darcy halted them just below the ridge of a rising ground, under cover of a line of broad shady trees. Dismounting himself, he crept to the top and looked carefully for some time through his field-glass.

“The Residency lies some three miles off, but is hidden by a wood.”

At this moment a corporal, who, with a single comrade, had been detached to watch the left rear, as the point of probable danger, rode up and saluted.

“Lieutenant,” he said, “I saw, at some distance, a number of what seemed to be Native horse soldiers, not in our uniform. The man at their head was dressed in the usual gorgeous fashion of their richer chiefs. I took him to be a Nawab or a Rajah.”

Riding backward a few rods so as to obtain a view

in the direction indicated, the officer scanned the landscape for some moments with his field-glass.

“I can’t make out the force he describes; they are moving away from us,” he said to his friend as he returned. “But it may well be the Rajah of Kulwar; and if so, all depends on his mood of the moment.—James,” in a low tone to the corporal, “don’t fancy that I don’t know you for a gentleman. I expect from you, now, a gentleman’s sense and coolness, as well as a gentleman’s courage. Take Williams with you; steal forward without being seen till you come within sight of the Residency. Get as near as you can without detection, and bring back word exactly how things are going there. If you see that the place is attacked, send him back to report at once, and push on to observe. If all is well come back quietly; don’t try to enter. Keep cool; we can’t afford either a delay or a blunder.—Now,” he remarked to Von Arnheim, as, carefully screening themselves under the shade of one of the largest trees, they followed anxiously the movements of their scouts, “if that Native force are resolute enemies it is all over with us, and, what is of more consequence, with Kavanagh and his family. If it be the Rajah, I cannot but hope that we may at least induce him to temporize. He is a man of sense, and will know that while the slaughter of a small party and the murder of a single family can do us little harm, it involves him in utter ruin if the event turns in our favour. But I hope he will not come up till we know what is going on yonder. It stands to reason that he should be our enemy, that he should wish to see us destroyed; but he knows so much more,

he is so much better educated than nine Native chiefs in ten, that he may be aware how certainly, should the worst befall us here, England will reconquer India and take vengeance for us. On the chance that he will remember this, and that his interest and not his natural feeling will govern his conduct, rests for the time the fortune of our cause in this province."

"True," replied the other. "But if I were he, I should think a chance of vengeance, with the probability of dying sword in hand, preferable to submission or neutrality."

"I am afraid he will agree with you—I should," said Darcy, gravely and somewhat sadly.

They had now lost sight for a few minutes of their scouts.

"Hark!" cried the German, suddenly, "that was a musket-shot. There! that is another."

"Is it?" said Darcy. "I hardly caught the sound."

"You are more used to volleys," replied Von Arnheim. "You are likely to know the sound of a single musket-shot before long as well as I. Yes, there is one of your men in sight, and riding at full speed."

It was so; and Darcy instantly drew up his troop in line, and moved them forward at a trot, riding himself in advance to meet the flying messenger. The trooper reeled in his saddle as he approached and saluted with his rein-hand, the sword-arm hanging powerless by his side.

"The Residency is attacked, Lieutenant. James has gone forward; he sent me back to warn you, and

as I got through the trees two shots were fired at me."

The man had husbanded his last breath to utter his report, and with the last words fell helplessly from his saddle. Darcy was about to dismount to his aid, when the German, who with the rest of the party had come up, touched him on the shoulder.

"You have no time for wounded men," he said. "It is hard, but you must leave him to his fate."

"Gallop!" cried Darcy; and, reluctantly leaving the dying man to perish, whether from the wounds he had already received, or the swords of enemies who might be lurking within reach, the little band rode forward at speed, till they were halted suddenly under shelter of that grove which had hitherto screened the Residency from their sight. Riding forward a few lengths, Darcy saw that a task desperate, if not utterly hopeless, lay before him. The Residency itself, a somewhat extensive building on one floor, crowned the summit of a small eminence laid out as a garden, with numerous fine trees therein. These and the out-buildings now served to shelter enemies who, to the number of two or three hundred, were threatening the dwelling itself, and to hinder the defence, which could depend only on the accurate firing of its sheltered inmates. As Darcy looked upon the swarming assailants, endeavouring to select instantaneously the best point for attack, a shot fired from the roof was answered by a scattering volley from without; and the compound, as the grounds of an Indian dwelling are called, was instantly filled with smoke, while the

assailants, emboldened by numbers, closed nearer and nearer to the building.

“There is but one chance,” thought Darcy, “and that is a bad one.”

He halted his men for a moment on the open ground at the edge of the grove to form a more accurate line than had been possible while broken by the trees. At this moment a Native darted from the wood at some little distance, shouting, and evidently eager to warn the assailants of the Residency; but before his shouts were noticed an English trooper, dashing from another part of the grove, intercepted and cut him down; and Darcy recognized the scout he had sent forward.

“If we get through,” he said, turning to his men, “wheel and form immediately in front of the verandah, and unsling carbines. Now—charge!”

A smooth grassy slope of some three hundred yards in extent separated them from the rear of the enemy, and was traversed in but a few seconds. They were seen before they had crossed half the space, and many of the enemy turned to confront them. But, as Darcy observed at once, they were not in uniform; were not mutinous Sepoys, but Natives who, though familiar with the use of their weapons, were wholly untrained to mutual support, and without a tincture of discipline, probably without recognized leadership. Many of them indeed fled across the compound as the Lancers swept down; but those who remained formed a dense irregular line far outflanking his own. But the impetus of the charge and the sight of the sharp gleaming lances partly bent by sheer terror,

partly broke by physical force, an enemy who, had they possessed any organization or discipline, or had they displayed as a body that courage which probably few of them individually lacked, must have annihilated the score of troopers. As it was, the latter rode through the scattering fire and the raised tulwars and spears with the loss of but two of their number, leaving more than a dozen of their antagonists dead or disabled. Darcy himself could take no personal part in the slaughter ; but riding two lengths in advance of his line, and trusting solely to the strength and speed of his horse, he dashed into the wavering ranks, and emerged still in front of his men, leading them by example to the summit of the slope. There, obedient to orders, they wheeled and levelled their carbines.

“ Hold ! ” cried Darcy, seeing that on this side the enemy were broken, and would not for some minutes be able to rally. Wheeling to the right, he took in flank the assailants of the front of the Residency. A volley from all the carbines of the band, followed by a charge in which the weight of the horses and the butts of the carbines told as effectively as the lances had done before, hurled back upon their friends on the third side of the little eminence the surprised and confounded rabble. Bringing the horses under shelter, Darcy led the remnant of his troop, fifteen or sixteen still effective men, right into the building itself, which had now been stormed from the rear. A hand-to-hand fight took place in the wide passages and rooms at the back ; but, unprepared for an encounter with so numerous an enemy, the assailants

speedily gave way in panic, believing that a British regiment at least had come to the rescue of a dwelling whose guard when they assailed it consisted as they knew of not more than a dozen Native soldiers or police, whereof some were probably untrustworthy. Posting his men at the windows, under such shelter as they could improvise, and bidding them take steady individual aim at any assailants, Darcy sought the roof; where, as he thought, sheltered by the low parapet, the Resident himself and the survivors of his party were most likely to be found. The scene that met his eyes sickened with horror one who, soldier as he was, had yet never seen violent death before this day. Three or four wounded and dead lay about in pools of blood. These were Natives who had proved, as so many did under whatever temptation, true to the salt they had eaten and the master they had served. But in the middle of the roof crouched a group of English women, and on the lap of the central figure rested the uncovered head of one whose face and form were not wholly unknown to him. Pierced by two balls through the lungs, his light clothing soaked and crimson with blood, lay Kavanagh himself; not the least able or least trusted of those to whom the Government at Calcutta had entrusted the management of the vassal States of the North-West. His wife, unconscious of all around her, bent over her dying husband, wiping constantly from his lips the bloody foam that rose with every gasp and well-nigh choked him. Her two daughters, girls just entering on womanhood, hung horror-stricken and helpless over their father, whose

eyes when they opened turned with an expression of unutterable pain and terror from one to another of the faces so dear to him, whose fate he knew to be involved in his own, and whose peril racked his spirit with agony, amid the gathering darkness of death; a death which, but for their sake, he would have encountered willingly, as always a possible if not probable incident of the service in which he had deliberately engaged. The look of unspeakable anguish on his countenance was not called forth by the wounds of which he was dying, but by the thought of that which within a few moments of his death, perhaps even before his eyes were closed to all sights of this world, awaited the beloved ones beside him. As Darcy approached he lifted his heavy lids, and recognized, not indeed the countenance, but the uniform. With one last effort of the manly vigour and energy he had enjoyed that morning, he raised himself, still resting on his wife's lap, sufficiently to look the rescuer full in the face.

“You have come in time,” he said. “Thank God for that! Try what you can do with the Rajah. If I had lived I might . . .”

The exertion of speech was fatal. A fearful gush of blood choked his utterance; and with a violent shudder the wounded man fell back dead, happy that in his last moments he believed the rescue complete, knew nothing of the peril that, though repelled for one moment, still gathered around his home. Standing beside the group of appalled mourners, Darcy's figure was of course visible above the low parapet to eyes at some distance, and as he rose from stooping over the

corpse three bullets whizzed close to his person and over the heads that still bent above the dead father and husband. Aware that what hope there might be depended on his own life, Darcy threw himself flat on the flags under the shelter of the parapet as he spoke. His disappearance, even were he not thought to be wounded or killed, would prevent the enemy from firing where only women were now visible.

“You must come down at once, Lady Helen,” he said in the quick, decided, but low and perfectly steady tone natural where pressing danger to the living leaves no leisure for mourning over the fallen. “This may be the best place for defence, but it is that which most certainly draws the fire of the enemy.”

Rising with some precaution to his knees, he took the hand of the widow, who half consciously permitted him to lead her below, her daughters instinctively following. Placing them in the innermost portion of the dwelling, the young officer approached the nearest window and looked out, surprised that on both sides but a few shots had been interchanged in the two or three minutes that had elapsed since the assailants had been driven out of the house itself. He saw, however, that they had been scared for the time by the suddenness of his attack and by the rapidity with which his blows had been repeated in three distinct quarters, and had fallen back in confusion and panic. They had already recognized by the number of horses that those who had dispersed them were but a small force, though their fear still in all probability greatly exaggerated his numbers. They were recovering their courage, not however as yet attempting boldly to

storm the house, but preparing to fire by scores at every opening and to direct a heavy volley on the roof. Darcy could spare no men to occupy this, the most effective position for defence, since few of the windows were barricaded, and those that remained open, if left unguarded, would enable the enemy at once to seize the building and hold all within or above at their mercy. The whole defensive force both of British troopers and of the Native guard did not now much exceed a score, and these were not strong enough to hold the building for five minutes against an attack at close quarters. James and the German rendered most active and valuable assistance, instructing the defenders how to protect themselves with furniture or cushions; and, where nothing capable of repelling a bullet could be found, to perplex and divert the enemy's fire, by simply screening their forms behind a sheet or blanket.

Sheltering themselves under trees and in the out-buildings, the boldest of the enemy were again gathering to the attack, and a dozen dropping shots announced the recommencement of their fire.

"Go up to the roof, James," said Darcy. "Keep under cover, and see if anything be approaching. If not, I need not tell you what will happen."

He was surprised to see the trooper as he obeyed carry off with him as many small cushions, cloths, and other articles of the same kind as he could lay hands on; but there was no time for comment or inquiry.

"Don't waste a shot," he said, leaving the men in that room to defend its windows, "and don't expose

yourselves. Remember, the safety of all and of the ladies depends upon each single life. One window forced, and all is over. We may have rescue yet; if not, you know how to die like Englishmen."

"Aye, sir, we can do that. But if there are ladies here, don't leave them to them Moors alive."

"Take charge of the front, Von Arnheim," said Darcy, as the crash and rattle of musketry, and the savage yells from without, announced that the attack had commenced in earnest. "The women are in the inmost room; they should not fall alive into these wretches' hands. And now——" he held out his hand.

The German clasped it earnestly. "Adieu," he muttered. "I wonder whether there be any truth in the old *sagen*? If so, Darcy, may I find myself near you to-night."

"I have blundered," said Darcy to himself bitterly, as he took his post at the rear, where he considered the danger greatest and most pressing, from the proximity of the outbuildings. "If Vane had brought a squadron or a troop, as, but for my presumptuous meddling, he might have done, we should have had a better chance. And yet—I don't know; sixty, or even a hundred, men could not hold this place many hours longer if the whole country is up."

For his purpose the young officer had chosen his men well. Some of them had seen service; scarcely one but had been engaged in some struggle for life amid scenes more or less lawless. They might mutiny in quarters or be troublesome on the march; but in the whole regiment no twenty men could have been

picked so sure to fight to the last, and fight with the coolness as well as the courage of desperadoes—to kill as well as to die. So steadily and skilfully did they single out the most venturous of the enemy—so certain and deadly was their aim at the close quarters to which the situation reduced the attack, trees, fences, and other obstacles rendering it impossible to fire with effect at more than sixty yards' distance from the house—that though from the outbuildings and other covers a constant fire was kept up, even this lost half its effect from the aversion of the Native marksmen to expose themselves; and though frequently urged to close, they could not be brought to attempt to force the windows from which unseen antagonists sent forth each minute almost certain death. But the country around had been raised by news of the conflict, and the numbers of the besiegers increased; while the new-comers were unaffected by the panic and dismay which Darcy's surprise had inspired among those who suffered from it. A dozen balls had passed within a couple of minutes through the window near which Darcy knelt, resting a rifle, taken from one of the slain defenders, on a chair sheltered by a mattress, and with his left hand loading and firing steadily;—taking a soldier's part in the defence, while watching the rear and listening for sounds elsewhere with all the vigilance of a commander under circumstances so desperate. At any moment some point in the building might be forced, and then all was over. He was now, however, surprised by the diversion of a great part of the enemy's fire to the roof, where, as he knew, except James, none of the defenders were stationed.

“Well that they waste powder and shot in that fashion,” he thought; “but I am afraid they have so plentiful a supply that it will make but very little difference.”

“Lieutenant,” said a trooper near him, “the word is passed that our cartridges are falling short. We had but sixty to begin with, and more than half are expended.”

“Pass the word to shoot from time to time, not to let them think we are short; but to fire only when there is fair certainty of striking. I forgot that,” he thought. “Even if these fellows don’t take heart, our defence is a question only of time—and of minutes.”

Two hours had elapsed since the Residency had been thus garrisoned, and the ammunition of its defenders was so reduced that most shrank from firing save when the Natives, gathering courage from impunity, ventured on some more than usually rash exposure. Their leaders had by this time made out pretty certainly the force of the defenders, and having persuaded their followers that there could not by possibility be thirty men within the building, had animated them for a rush. They came on, yelling, firing much at random, brandishing swords and clubbed muskets. The fire drawn by this venture from every window checked them again, and yet again, long enough to allow the troopers to reload and fire, and nearly every shot told. But the loss of two or three score among many hundreds no longer affected men who knew that victory was in their own hands.

“You will let me die by your side, Lieutenant?”

Darcy heard, and turning, saw James beside him. "I made up what they took for crouching figures on the roof, and drew as much of their fire there as I could. But there are some three or four hundred men coming up to reinforce them, and these seem to be trained cavalry, though not ours. It is all over, Mr. Darcy; no one will know, and I shan't live to tell it. You called me a gentleman. It is years since I touched a gentleman's hand—are you too proud to give yours to a trooper in your regiment?"

"Proud to give it to a brave man," answered Darcy, holding out his left hand, disregarding of military etiquette, to the comrade who had come to die beside him. "You know my right——" He interrupted himself to aim steadily at one of the assailants, who, displaying far greater nerve and daring than the rest, had more than once brought his followers in dangerous proximity to the window. This man's fall dismayed them for but a moment; then, with a cry of rage, they rushed forward and were clambering over the low railing of the verandah, despite the death of three shot down by Darcy's revolver and the muskets of the two troopers near him, both now wounded. The Englishmen had sprung up with lance or sword in hand, and James, flinging the former weapon with all his force, had sent it through the body of the nearest assailant. Another second and a Native spear struck Darcy in the breast through the sling that held his right arm, and flung him to the ground. Before he could struggle to his feet a tulwar would have cloven through his neck, but that James's sword interposing cut down the assailant, and checked the rush for

another second. But as in the rear, so all around, the assault had closed in, and the enemy were overwhelming the little garrison by sheer weight and physical force. Suddenly the sound of a trumpet and a cry in Hindoostanee checked the assault. Both parties, surprised, dropped for an instant the points of their weapons, and a signal word passed along the Native line.

“Hold !” shouted at its utmost pitch a voice which Darcy recognized, in the tongue of the enemy. “Hold, and fall back. I will have these men prisoners alive, not their dead bodies. Bid them cease firing, if they would save themselves and their women.”

The greater part of the Natives obeyed and slowly drew back. But it is scarcely easier to snatch the prey in the moment of triumph from savage men than from the fiercest beasts. At more than one point hand-to-hand fighting having already begun, was hardly to be checked ; and, persistent in slaying, the defenders would have brought certain slaughter on themselves and their comrades, had not Darcy promptly seized what might be a chance of safety when instant destruction was otherwise certain.

“Cease firing,” he shouted, “and pass the word to ground arms along the line.”

His word was heard by half the garrison, and in another minute the command had passed and been obeyed throughout. Hastening up to the roof, he saw by what means the assault had been checked and the doomed lives within saved for the moment. Without the compound, ranged in two long regular

lines, was halted a body of fairly disciplined Native cavalry. In their front, held by a young Indian noble, whose rank was indicated by his dress and arms, hung the standard of the Rajah of Kulwar. That Prince himself had ridden up to the front of the house, and his authority, strenuously and peremptorily exerted, had for a moment quelled the fury of men half of whom were his immediate subjects ; while the other half revered him as the chief of one of the greatest and oldest houses in that part of India, known and admired among them for his high spirit and venerated for his strict adherence to the obligations of his caste. He started slightly as he recognized on the roof, not indeed the face black with powder and still disfigured by the scars of the fire, but the uniform of the Lancer.

“Where,” he inquired, in English, “is Mr. Kavanagh?”

“Dead, Rajah,” was the reply ; “shot by this rabble in the first attack before I came up.”

The Indian started visibly and a dark cloud of anger, dismay, or both, passed over his face.

“That is ill done,” he said. “Dogs,” he added, turning to the Natives around him, “how dare you attack without my orders any house in my dominion? How dare you commit me with the British Government by slaying its minister without my order? I should do well to bid my troopers cut you down to a man.”

His sovereign claim on their fealty revived by the circumstances of the time—recognizing their natural Prince, who, the supreme authority temporarily at least overthrown, was now once more their absolute

master—the crowd were awed by the rebuke and terrified by the menace, and slunk backward without excuse or reply.

“You must surrender,” said the Rajah, once more addressing the officer, but speaking now in his Native tongue. “If Mr. Kavanagh were living I could treat with him; but to you I can only say surrender at once—as prisoners of war,” he added in English, so quickly that the syllables could hardly be caught by those about him, much less their special significance understood.

“You do ill, Rajah, to treat British soldiers as your enemies, to range yourself among those who have made war on our *raj*, and whose war is made by treachery and murder. I am sure you had no part in the traitorous attack on the Residency and the murder of Mr. Kavanagh; and, if you are loyal, I give you the word of a British officer that your own loyalty shall not be forgotten, nor the crime of your subjects laid to your charge.”

“I should know your voice,” the Rajah said. “But,” he added in a moment, “whoever you are, I have but one answer to make. Surrender to me, and I promise your lives; if you resist I could not save you if I would.”

“I surrender, then,” Darcy replied, “on condition that the ladies of the Residency are committed to your honour, and shall be treated with respect till you can return them to a British station. Women are not prisoners of war. For the rest, there is with me a gentleman, lately a guest of your own, who is no servant of the Queen or of the Company, nor yet

an Englishman. If you respect the laws of war and the rights of hospitality, you know that honour requires you to dismiss him in honour and safety."

"No," said the Count von Arnheim, who now stood by Darcy's side. "I fought with my friends, and I will share their fate, be it what it may."

"You are my friend and guest, sahib," answered the Rajah, courteously. "For you, sir"—to Darcy—"when the house and your arms are given up, I promise your lives; and for the household of the late Resident, they shall be safe till I can send them in safety and honour to a British station; and in return you will avouch to your Government that I was innocent of the murder of Mr. Kavanagh."

"Agreed, Rajah," said Darcy. "And now be good enough to order your own troopers to guard the Residency while I muster the garrison, and form them in front to receive us as we march out, or others will dishonour the word you have pledged."

Gathering his men hastily together and forming them in military order, Darcy announced the terms of the capitulation. Their faces indicated bitter humiliation and anger; but only boys could have been foolish enough to resent a submission, which, if it should have gained them no more than a respite, had at least saved an English matron and English maidens from the unutterable horrors of falling into the hands of an infuriate Indian rabble. Then the young officer entered the room where the ladies, whom Von Arnheim had already informed of the capitulation, awaited him. Lady Helen, utterly broken down and stunned by her husband's horrible death under her

own eyes, hardly seemed to understand her situation, or the few words of attempted consolation that Darcy ventured. But her elder daughter, a girl of scarcely seventeen, was more alive to what was passing.

“My father,” she observed, in a low tone, “said but this morning that an English officer should never surrender to a Native enemy, especially in times like these; that it was better to die fighting to the last, since no terms of capitulation could be relied upon.”

“Possibly,” said Darcy. “The worst that could befall us was the death of soldiers, and we may fare worse as prisoners. But all was over. Another minute would have left you and your sister and mother at the mercy of a Native mob, and—you do not know what that means; but to save you from that it was our duty to surrender, as, could we have saved you with our lives, it would have been an easier duty to die.”

“And,” the girl asked, colouring deeply and then turning pale as death, “what may be our fate as prisoners?”

“I know,” he replied, “the Chief to whom I have surrendered. He has pledged his faith for your safe and honourable treatment till you are restored to British protection. I think he will keep his word if he can; but if the worst happen—if only death can save you from what is worse than death”—he took from a small inner pocket in his tunic a little quill such as is often employed by Natives to conceal small notes or similar objects, as it can be used to keep open the holes bored for earrings, without exciting suspicion. “Fearing what may happen to any of us

in these days—dreading lest torture should drive me to betray my comrades or my honour—I have carried this about with me for some time. You may need it worse than I. Take it, but use it only at the last moment; for, placed in your mouth and chewed, it will give the safety of the grave in a single instant.”

Her colour changed from scarlet to a ghostly white more than once as he spoke these few words; but her little hand scarcely trembled as she took the deadly present.

“I thank you,” she murmured, “more than I can say. No more precious gift was ever given me.”

Count von Arnheim gave his arm to Lady Helen and led her out, still apparently insensible to all that passed. Her two daughters accompanied Darcy. When safe between the steady lines of Native troopers that fronted them on either side, the young officer, pressing the hand of the fair companion to whom he had just spoken, fell back to the head of his men; and as they piled their arms he drew with his left hand his own sword and surrendered it to the Rajah in person. Looking him closely and intently in the face, the latter spoke in a low tone—

“I recognize you now, Lieutenant Darcy, and I have not forgotten. I myself could not do better for you than to make you my prisoners for the moment. To-night I will talk with you again.”

The ladies were placed in palanquins. Darcy and the Count were, by the grace of their captor, permitted to mount their own chargers, and, closely guarded, rode by his side. The men followed, disarmed and on foot, between two long rows of Native

horsemen; strictly watched, but neither bound nor treated with rudeness by their captors, better disciplined apparently than almost any body of troops in the service of a Native Prince.

The sun was setting as, filing up a long broad slope, they reached the moat which guarded on this side the Rajah's old-fashioned, half-ruinous fortress-palace, standing on the summit of a hill precipitous on the three other sides, but hollowed, according to repute, by chambers natural or artificial, forming one of the oldest cave temples of India. The German closely scanned the wall of weather-worn stone, which crossed the narrow neck of the mountain peninsula, if we may so call it, and with a dry moat protected it on its one accessible side.

“Earth piled against those stones would make them impenetrable to anything but heavy guns,” he murmured in French to Darcy, as they waited for the lowering of the clumsy drawbridge. This passed, they were escorted by Native soldiers, sternly silent, but manifesting neither goodwill nor open animosity, to a tolerably furnished but small chamber on an upper floor of the somewhat extensive building. The ladies, they gathered, had been conveyed to the zenana of the Rajah; while the troopers were confined under strong guard in a half-subterranean vault or dungeon.

CHAPTER VII.

VÆ VICTIS !

“And blood for blood these Indian plains bedew.”

“I DON'T deny, Rajah, that, in your place, I might desire before all things to measure swords with the men who had slighted and insulted me, and with the Power that had reduced me to insignificance and inaction. But I should hesitate to seek vengeance by leaguings with mutineers and murderers. No exploits, no successes, can make heroes of the leaders in this rebellion. Their names will be stained with the blood of men assassinated by treachery, shot in the back by their pretended friends and sworn followers, or stabbed in their sleep ; and of women and children butchered and outraged by those to whose fidelity their husbands and fathers had trusted. And you yourself must know that if you join the rebels, no evidence will clear your fame before the world from complicity in the murder of Mr. Kavanagh. Von Arnheim and I may believe you innocent, but no one else will. Thus you will not have the satisfaction, which might perhaps be that you would choose above all others, of dying sword in hand on the last battle-field after an honourable struggle ; and success you must know is impossible.”

The Indian Prince, a stately, handsome, well-made gentleman of some thirty years, scarcely darker in colour than most Italians, and with the features, air, and bearing that became the descendant of a long line of gentlemen and soldiers, listened with grave dignity and careful attention as Darcy spoke; his physiognomy sufficiently attesting the intellect of a capable politician, his manner the thoughtful interest of a statesman at a most critical juncture in his own fortunes and those of his country.

“I will not interrupt you now,” he answered, as the other paused for a moment. “You, of course, as it is your duty to do, speak in the interest of your Sovereign and your country. But I know that even for *their* interest such Englishmen as you are do not lie. If you keep back part of the case, you believe all that you do say.”

“I will put the whole fairly before your Highness,” replied Darcy. “If the Hindoo and the Mussulman can act together, if you can find leaders who will command the allegiance of both, if all your various races or princes at feud with one another for ages co-operate heartily—you may at first drive us back on the sea and slaughter all the English, except their few concentrated garrisons, from the frontier of the Punjaub to Calcutta. But you know how small is the chance of any such concert. Grant, what is possible, that the whole Army of Bengal will rise, that all the North-West will be in rebellion, that we shall hold only a few strong positions, and shall lose some hundreds of brave men and helpless women. Suppose yourselves victorious. What is the best you can

look to? Anarchy and ravage throughout all India, such as prevailed before the British conquest, when the Mahrattas and the Pindarees desolated at their pleasure one tract of rich and defenceless country after another, and reduced millions to die of hunger when their harvests were swept away; or else the re-establishment of the Mahometan empire and Mahometan ascendancy. Was that better than ours? But your chance even of temporary success is not a good one. Do you know that at this moment a powerful British expedition, stronger than the forces with which we conquered Mysore, ten times greater than that which reduced Bengal in a single battle, is on its way to China and within reach of the Viceroy's summons? How long will it be before that force, against which demoralized mutineers or undisciplined Native levies could not stand in a single battle-field, will land at Calcutta? But suppose the best that can happen for the rebels; suppose we had lost all but our foothold in Lower Bengal, Madras, Bombay, and the Punjaub. We shall hold *that* by turning the ambition and vengeance of the Sikhs upon the Native army which claims to have beaten them, but which they affirm would have fled before the Khalsa but for our European regiments. Do you think that England would leave her servants' murder unpunished, the butchery of her women unrevenged, the stain on her glory uncleansed? Her entire force—a force that less than fifty years ago braved half Europe united against her under the greatest soldier Europe has seen—would be gathered and launched upon India. All her resources in men and wealth

would be lavished, if necessary for years, to regain her empire and redeem her honour. You say that I speak as a servant of the Queen of England. Von Arnheim, your friend and guest, owes no such allegiance; ask him whether there be the faintest possibility that even a temporary overthrow of the British *raj* could end in anything but reconquest and terrible revenge."

"None whatever," Von Arnheim replied. "England would not be safe in Europe, she could retain no portion of her empire, were she to be driven from India and not regain by the sword what she has held by the sword for a hundred years."

"On the other hand, Rajah," continued Darcy, "look at your own personal position. Joining our enemies, you are one among a hundred ambitious rivals, influential no doubt but with no chance of the leadership, and certain to find your own ability, courage, and resolve rendered useless by divided counsels and worthless commanders. And when the day of vengeance comes, you will be remembered and your name will be recorded in history as the author of this morning's treacherous outrage. Your house and your lineage will be blotted from the land. Adhere loyally to the Government, in spite of the wrongs or affronts you have received, and you may reasonably and surely expect such reward and honour as mere policy must oblige the Company to give to a distinguished Indian Prince, who at this critical moment throws his sword into our scale; and military service and military honour are at least as open to you on our side as on the other."

“You forget one fact,” said the Rajah, quietly, “which has touched every Native Prince, every Rajah and Zemindar throughout the land:—your policy of resumption, and, worse than that, your Right of Lapse, which has wantonly and in disregard of your own plighted faith overturned our law of inheritance, and forfeited, for no fault, with no shadow of right, thrones and dominions guaranteed by most solemn treaties and held by those who have served you loyally since they first accepted your alliance. We can never forget Sattara.”

“You know,” Darcy replied, “how heartily many of our best and most experienced statesmen hated and opposed that policy. No epithet you have now applied to it but would be repeated by men like Henry Lawrence; and their school, turning the lesson of this year to account, will henceforward direct the policy of our Government; whereas those who now draw swords against us, leagued with mutineers and assassins, can look for no fate but extermination.”

The Rajah listened carefully with profound attention, and remained silent for some minutes in deep and anxious thought.

“You overlook another consideration,” he said at last. “Against the Company, I can command the passionate, devoted adherence of every subject of my own who can draw a sword, the support of nearly every neighbouring prince. Siding with the Company, I can hardly depend on the fidelity of any but my own *babalogue*, and may look to be besieged in my own fortress by my own countrymen.”

“And to have that siege recorded in the annals of

India as one of the noblest services rendered by a Native to the British Government, and rewarded by whatever honours that Government can bestow."

"It is well for your people," said the Rajah at length, "that you and no other English officer commanded at the Residency and surrendered to me. Well, too, perhaps, that Mr. Kavanagh was your Resident, and that he was murdered without my knowledge and against my will. Of all you have said, nothing affects me so deeply as the intolerable shame of siding with the murderers of one to whom my protection had been promised; and next to that, nothing moves me so much as the thought that in taking part against the Government I must wrong and injure yourself. I have not forgotten your courtesy, any more than I forget the insolence of those ill-bred boys who fancy that every British Ensign or Joint Collector is the superior of men whose fathers were great princes while his were slaves or pariahs. In any case, you and your men shall go free; your horses and your arms shall be returned to you. But to send you forth, even by night and in secret, would be to send you to slaughter. Long before you could cross half the country between here and Sivapore, your little party would be surrounded and cut to pieces."

"We must take our chance of that," said Darcy; "but it is not our fate that matters. The ladies for whom your word is pledged must be conveyed safely to an English station, and one where they will not forthwith fall into worse hands than yours."

"I doubt," answered the Indian, "whether that

would be within my power, even if I could attempt it without exciting the distrust and suspicion of my neighbours, without appearing openly to side with you ; and if I stand by the Government, I can do no more than hold my own here. In any case, the women are safer here than anywhere whither I can send them. Bid them trust me, Lieutenant Darcy ; and, if you can believe the word of a Native, accept my promise that none shall lift their veils while a gun is mounted on my walls or I can hold a sword.”

“ Will your Highness permit me to see and speak to them ? ”

“ Certainly,” the Rajah replied. “ I will take you where they shall come to you ; and when you leave them you will find me here again with the Count.”

Following him, Darcy traversed a passage, apparently excavated in the outer wall of the fortress, and reached a chamber more commodious than that he had left, but furnished exclusively in Indian fashion, with carpets and cushions. The Rajah retired, and in a few minutes the ladies were ushered into the room by a slave of the zenana, while others brought in a meal prepared after the Indian fashion, the chief dish being chicken covered with rice and flavoured with the Native spices, of which our curry is an imitation. Some little pains had been taken to adapt both the refreshments themselves and the means of eating to European customs. Placing their trays on the ground, the slaves retired. The mother had scarcely yet roused herself to active interest in her new and alarming situation ; her younger daughter was bewildered, partly by terror and partly by the

infection of her mother's helpless distress. The elder, though very pale, and her eyes manifestly swollen by weeping, was calm and keenly alive to all that passed. She had tact enough to use few words and little urgency in inducing her mother to eat, treating almost as matter of course what it was nevertheless most difficult to accomplish. When she had persuaded both her companions half-consciously to taste the food before them, she gave her attention to the graver necessities of the situation; and rather by manner than in actual words expressed her wish to hear what Darcy had to report or to advise.

“What,” asked the latter, “was your father's estimate of the Rajah?”

“Of course,” she answered, “I know very little. We had only been here a few weeks, and he did not talk much on public matters in our presence. But I think he liked and trusted the Rajah, at least in some measure, as a very favourable example of an Indian Prince; though he spoke as if the ambition and active spirit that could find no career in the Company's service or under our rule might at a critical moment render him dangerous. I know, too, that early this morning he sent a message to this place, and that when the attack was first threatened, his only hope was in the Rajah's interference. But surely it was as an enemy that the Rajah came, and it was as prisoners that he brought us here?”

“That proves nothing. It might have been difficult for him to have beaten off our assailants by the sword, even could he have trusted at once and on the moment the fidelity of his own men if suddenly called

upon to attack their kinsmen and fellow-subjects. And had he brought us here as friends, the fortress would have been in all probability besieged before now. To tell you the truth, Miss Kavanagh, I see no other hope than in his loyalty, if not to the Government, at least to his own word. He has pledged that word solemnly and earnestly for your safety. We could not, if free and clear of this place, convey you securely to Sivapore with our small party ; and if we could, I believe you would hardly be safer there than here. I know that experienced men, whether civilians or soldiers, are averse to trust to Native loyalty under strong temptation, and I think it quite possible that the Rajah may decide to join the rebellion which has broken or will very soon break out all over this part of India. But even in that case, I think you will be safe with him ; and if not, I know no other chance of safety."

"Except," she answered, calmly, but growing still paler as she spoke, "that which you have given me."

"Remember," said Darcy, eagerly, "that that is only to be used in the last extremity and at the very last moment. Even when all rational hope is gone, it is not time for so desperate a resort ; because in a single instant *that* will place you beyond their power. How have you been treated ? Have you seen the ladies of the Rajah's household ?"

"Yes ; and the two or three we saw seemed kindly, and anxious to show us courtesy and consideration, but shy and of course hardly able to convey their meaning to my mother in her distress, or even to me. We hardly know a word of their language, and can only judge their feeling by signs and looks."

“Those are of some moment,” he replied, “because, beyond mere womanly feeling for a woman in sorrow, their conduct will be regulated by what they know or guess of their master’s feelings and wishes.”

He turned to the widow, endeavouring to explain the situation and elicit from her some expression of opinion, some sign that at least she understood and appreciated his reasonings. But beyond a dull attention to his words, and a tacit assent to his advice, she seemed still incapable of thought or decision.

“After all,” said her daughter, “we must abide by your counsel, since we know nothing ourselves and have no other adviser. But I do trust you will in no case leave us here alone.”

“I may have to do so,” Darcy replied, “and possibly without opportunity of seeing you again; but I will endeavour in that case that Von Arnheim, the German who joined us in our attempt to defend the Residency, and who is with me here, shall remain and, if possible, have access to you. If not, it will be plain that the Rajah is inclining to become our enemy; but, as I have said, even in that case I hope that you are safe.”

A signal at the door interrupted him, and a slave entering intimated that his master desired the sahib’s presence.

“Good-bye, then, for the present,” he said. “Don’t fear without fresh and strong reason, and don’t despair at the worst.”

“Not for ourselves,” said the girl, “till the last; but for you, who have fallen into this peril simply for our sakes?”

“I have merely done a soldier’s duty, and must take the chances of a soldier’s life.”

“God guard you,” she answered, earnestly. “We can pray for you, if we can do no more. And if we do not meet again, believe that we shall not forget either you or those who with you were so ready to give their lives for my father and for us.”

“Mr. Darcy,” said the Rajah, “I have sent out men in all directions to learn what is going on. They have in two cases made prisoners whose names may interest you. They have brought in an Eurasian girl and a Native lady, the widow, they say, of a British officer, a Captain Manton; and a Native, who has been a British soldier, but says he is now your servant. I hardly believed him, for he is not of a caste that ever seeks such employment.”

“I know well the ladies your Highness mentions. The mother is a descendant of the last Rajah of Bundaghar, and for his sake and that of her house I know that she and her daughter will be safe in your hands. They too will be glad to hear that I am living, and so near them; perhaps you may allow me to see them at another time. My servant was once a soldier in the battalion now at Sivapore, and is by birth and lineage an Arab warrior, claiming descent from the Koreish, though his family have been for two centuries settled in India.”

“Then he told the truth,” said the Rajah, as, clapping his hands, he called attendants remaining outside the door. “Bid them bring hither the prisoner taken on his way to the Residency. Mr. Darcy, you will like to hear his tidings in private?”

“No, Rajah,” answered Darcy, who had made up his mind, hastily but of deliberate purpose, to display full and unreserved confidence in his host; and recognized the uselessness of attempting to conceal any important tidings, which must in a very short time be as well known to all around him as to himself. “Hear all there is to tell, and judge with as full a knowledge of the facts as my own.”

Deprived of his arms but otherwise unhurt, and treated in no hostile manner by his captors, Afzul was ushered into the room.

“Speak out,” said his master; “let the Rajah as well as ourselves know what you have to say.”

“Sahib,” was the reply, “Sivapore is lost to the British. Both the Native regiments have mutinied, and your squadron is scattered if not destroyed.”

“How?” said Darcy. “What has happened since I left?”

“The report, sahib, went through all the lines that your party was sent to bring down a regiment of British cavalry and a battery of artillery.”

“From whence?” asked Darcy in surprise.

“I asked them that question,” replied Afzul, “when they talked to me. Nobody knew, and each man named a different place. I told them there was neither cavalry nor artillery at any of the stations they named, and if there had it could not have been spared. But the Infantry were too much frightened to listen to reason, and the Mahometan troopers had made up their minds to rise as soon as the Infantry would go with them. Major Thomson heard the story, and paraded the regiment the afternoon after

you left. He ordered cartridges to be served out as usual. I need not tell you they were the old cartridges that had been in store for more than a year. But the men would not believe it; they are mad on the subject, and it is useless reasoning with them. They refused to take them, and one of the soubahdars asked the Major if the Europeans were coming. He did not answer, and the men were sure that it was true. Then he told them: 'In presence of British troops you know you must obey. You had better obey at once, or you will repent it.' Then the ranks broke, and the men began to threaten and point their muskets. The officers wanted to go among their men, and Captain Everett in particular wished to form his company, in which there are so many Sikhs, apart; but the Major would not hear of it. He said they would all be murdered, and he sent for the Lancer squadron."

"Madman!" said Darcy to himself.

"Then, of course, the men went mad with terror. They fired and killed several of their officers; and at the sound of the firing, the Native Cavalry mounted and rode through the cantonment yelling 'Deen,' and cutting down every European they met. They dashed into the European cantonments before your squadron could be mounted, killed many of them, and set fire to the stables. Colonel Vane got some of the horses out and mounted a few of his men; but they were overpowered, and I don't know what has become of the rest. When I left, most of the sahibs' bungalows had been robbed and burnt, and I saw several women and children dead, but which I hardly know. I only know

that most of the officers of the Native Infantry and Cavalry were shot or stabbed, and the Brigadier was shot down as he galloped to the Native lines to try and steady the Infantry, when he heard what Major Thomson had been doing."

"Now, Rajah," said Darcy, after dismissing his servant, "your Highness must make your election promptly. This is only what we knew would happen within a few days, and what will happen in nearly every station of the Bengal Army. But I will not be detained longer except as a prisoner; and detaining me, your Highness declares against the Government. I must march before daybreak and attempt to find out what has become of the remains of the squadron of ours at Sivapore, and whether any women and children are alive who can be saved—unless I am constrained by force as a prisoner of war."

"Do you forget," returned the Prince, "that I told you that in no case should you be my prisoner? But your purpose is sheer madness. You could not have reached Sivapore alive, before these tidings were known; now, it is tenfold more impossible."

"Whether I can act with any hope of success depends on your Highness; but act I must, if it be only to die."

The Rajah looked with admiration and sympathy as the young soldier spoke, standing erect, his left hand instinctively seeking his sword, with firm, compressed lips, and a suppressed fire in his eye that belied the cold matter-of-fact tone.

"I had sooner," he said, "fall fighting beside such a comrade than even conquer such a foe. If my own

children have not turned against me, you shall take with you such part of my force as you think we may safely spare; and my nephew, he who carried my standard at the Residency, shall lead them under your orders. I wish I could come with you; but in my absence others might fail my trust and dishonour the promise I have given you."

"On no account, Rajah, must your Highness leave this place. Send out and bring in all the supplies you can gather, all the arms and powder you can lay hands on. Don't let the people outside know, while you can help it, that you have decided for the Company. Deepen your moat, and throw up an earthen bank, as high as you can, and at least twelve feet in thickness at the base, against the outer wall. Von Arnheim, you will be of more use to his Highness here than even to me in the field. Have you water?"

"Yes," the Rajah answered; "a well sunk deep from the centre of the old cave-temple, which has supplied the garrison in more than one long siege before your people were ever seen within a thousand miles of it."

"And can you make the caves safe as a refuge for women and wounded? For even field guns may do no little mischief in the palace itself."

"Every entrance," replied the Rajah, "is at least thirty feet above the ground below, and not one can be reached except from the inner courts and the zenana."

"They may make good batteries, if the mouths be blocked with earth, fascines, or even sacks of straw or cotton covered with earth, and wetted to prevent

catching fire," said Darcy. "Von Arnheim, you will look to this—under his Highness's orders. Rajah, let our horses be ready that my men may mount by moonrise, and have yours ready to join us. But send with us none whose faith you doubt; a small force we can trust thoroughly is better than thrice the number with a few traitors among them. Thank God," he said, turning to Von Arnheim, as the Rajah left the room, "the women are safe now; and we have a chance at least to maintain the fame and honour, if not the fact, of British authority in this part of the country, till we are rescued or the event is decided by the sword elsewhere."

"I doubt," said the Count, "you are acting with more courage than prudence in the sally you are making. It is likely to betray at once the Rajah's intention; and if you meet any enemies at all they are likely to be in irresistible number."

"We have found no numbers irresistible in India," said Darcy. "A very small force of Natives, encouraged by British leadership and support, has been proved over and over again to be a match for ten times their number under Native leaders. I shall leave a short note for Lady Helen or her daughter, who is less stricken down than her mother by the terror and calamities of the day. Now I will go and warn my men, and then try to sleep till the time to start."

Half an hour after the rising of the moon, the little band of some twelve English troopers, followed by eighty picked men of the Rajah's own guard under the command of his young relative, moved slowly and

steadily out, filing across the drawbridge of the castle ; riding silently through the streets of the Native village below, and forming in regular order on the plain without. After a short conversation with his Native lieutenant, Darcy entrusted to him the charge of the small party sent in advance, directing a couple of Native troopers to some distance on each flank and drawing up the Europeans in front of the main body. They had ridden far at a quick but steady pace before the heat of the sun obliged them to make their first halt ; and when they bivouacked for the night—Europeans and Natives in seeming friendship, though the former hardly felt for their allies the confidence apparently reposed in them by their officer—they were sufficiently advanced to render it expedient to send out patrols in quest of information and to learn whether either English fugitives or rebel troops were to be found within a score of miles. Half an hour before the time fixed for the morning start, Darcy, sleeping with his saddle for a pillow, wearied out by the hard work of the last few days, so that even the anxiety of his charge could not keep his eyes open for a minute after his duties permitted him to rest, was awakened by the touch of a hand on his shoulder, and springing up saw beside him the young Rao, who made a sign to him to listen in silence and speak low.

“ One of our best men,” he said, “ has brought word that a force of mutineers is bivouacked some twelve miles hence. They have no idea of our approach or of the presence of any enemy within fifty miles, and are therefore carelessly encamped ; and if they have posted sentries these are likely to be half asleep and quite off their guard.”

In answer to some brief inquiries from Darcy, the Native scout described with no little military aptitude the position occupied by the enemy.

They lay not far from the bank of a river on the same side as the small British force, and in their immediate neighbourhood was a ford passable, as reported, by cavalry; guarded, however, by a small patrol. The enemy consisted of some four or five hundred Native cavalry, probably a part of the force which had mutinied at Sivapore. The scout thought, though he was not sure, that there were among them some European prisoners.

“Now, Djuna Rao,” said the young officer, when he had given orders to mount and prepare for the march, “I give you the full and absolute trust which an English gentleman gives when he trusts at all. It is of great importance to strike a blow, even though we risk more than the immediate harm we may be able to do seems worth. We can better afford to throw away our own lives than to let these rebels think that they are safe for a moment, or that the power of the British is paralyzed by fear or surprise. I mean to attack the camp, and to strike just before daybreak. Lead your men along this bank of the river, and steadily but at a quick pace, for you must cover at least ten miles an hour. Halt them as near the enemy as you dare in perfect silence. When you hear three carbine shots fired at the ford to your left, about half a mile from their camp, charge at once into their midst, and let your men shout and yell as much as they please. Slaughter, but don’t pursue, and, above all, take care to keep your men in hand.

If we fail, return directly to Kulwar. If we succeed, be sure that the Company will not forget you."

The Native signified his acceptance of the charge, and the party separated, Darcy and his troopers, with a guide selected from among their Native comrades, fording the river about a mile to the left of their line of march, and moving at a walk for more than an hour along its opposite bank in order to screen their approach from the enemy's possible patrols or spies in his interest. As they approached the indicated ford they moved away from the bank and formed fronting the river, about two hundred yards off; where, the dawn scarcely yet visible on the eastern horizon, they were safe from observation unless an enemy should be lurking in their immediate neighbourhood. Darcy with two troopers rode down towards the ford, halting at such a distance that the tramp of their horses could not be heard on the soft ground, and stealing down to the bank. The rest of the party had orders to rejoin their chief at a gallop, cross the ford, and make for the enemy's position, at the same signal that had been promised their Native ally: the discharge of three carbines. Hidden by the reeds immediately at the water's edge, Darcy scanned carefully and anxiously the opposite bank; and it was not long before he discerned the forms of two Native troopers in British uniform, mounted, but letting their horses graze, and sitting carelessly, as ill-disciplined sentries who felt assured that no peril was within a day's march, and were not apprehensive of a sudden visit from their superiors to keep them on the alert.

“Mark the man to the right,” said Darcy to James, who lay beside him, “and don’t miss. You”—to his other comrade—“take the fellow on the left.” He had himself taken a spare carbine, and prepared to fire in case either of his companions should fail.

One shot, another, and both the rebel troopers fell. Their horses started off in terror, and Darcy, firing his own piece, ran back to remount. Before he had done so his party galloped past, and he and his attendants caught them up but a hundred yards on the other side, the Native encampment now lying full in view. The horses were picketed, the men sleeping, their heads pillowed on their saddles, their arms piled as in perfect peace and security. Sentries had been posted, but with so little judgment or care that they offered no obstacle to the charge. The shots had half aroused a few of the sleepers but had not alarmed the camp; and they were perfectly helpless as from one side the small party of English Lancers, from the other the Rajah’s retainers, armed with their sharp curved swords, dashed into their midst, guided by the faint twilight of the East. The mutineers made no attempt to fight, and hampered and overthrew one another in their efforts to escape. The assailants slaughtered twice their own number on the spot, pursued and cut down several of the fugitives, and would have scattered in chase but for the imperious recel sounded by a Native bugler under Darcy’s orders, and the energetic efforts of the young Rao to rally his own men. A dozen wounded prisoners were taken, and to these Darcy put a few sharp brief inquiries, questioning each separately in presence of

his own corporal and of the Native leader. That the station of Sivapore had been completely sacked, that most if not all the European officers of the insurgent regiments had been butchered, that the commanding officer of the station had certainly fallen, that a large proportion of his own comrades had been cut to pieces, and that the rest had not been seen at any time during the two or three hours of confusion and pillage that elapsed before the Native cavalry left, and therefore were probably dispersed, was clearly ascertained. It was less certain, because the temptation to lie was common and the motive obvious to all the witnesses, that no mutineers were now left in the station ; that it was in the hands of the worst portion of its large population of camp followers and of the bad characters of every sort that infest a military station. Some European women and children might be in their power alive ; and if rescue were impossible, vengeance was not merely desirable, but was under the circumstances a distinct obligation of military duty and policy. The fugitive mutineers whom Darcy had dispersed were without their horses, and for the most part without arms. The best of their animals, as fresher than his own, Darcy selected to remount several of his European and Native followers. The only captives found in the camp were the wife of a European sergeant with two little girls. The latter were half clothed in rags, their skins stained, apparently in a hasty attempt to pass them as Natives or Eurasians, and soiled with dirt ; but a single glance assured an eye like Darcy's that they did not belong to the woman in whose company they were found.

“Whose are these children?” he said to her.

“I don’t know,” replied the scared and half-idiotic creature, maddened by the horrors through which she had passed. But the elder girl, some eight years old, recognizing the voice of a countryman, answered for herself.

“I am Minnie Thomson,” she said, “and this is Fanny. They burnt our house the other day, and we were at the General’s; and then they came there and beat the servants and killed Johnny, and the ayah dragged us out and rubbed some nasty stuff over us; but the Sowars snatched us from her and knocked her down.”

Again and again, without being recognized, Darcy had rescued from death the infant daughters of his enemy. However heartily he might wish that they had been the children of any other man, he could neither rejoice the less in their escape, nor soothe the less tenderly their natural terror. He placed the woman on a spare horse, entrusted the younger child to a trooper, and took the elder on his own saddle, bidding a soldier fasten round her a sash attached to his belt. The Rajah’s soldiery in the mean time had, by his direction, shot the horses and destroyed the arms it was impossible to carry away. The little one, who had been too frightened to protest against the arrangement, though manifestly scared at finding herself in a stranger’s charge, “on a tall soldier’s horse,” looked up into Darcy’s face, and gaining courage from its expression, said—

“We are so hungry. They gave us nothing to eat all this way, and no milk.”

“Can you eat this?” said Darcy, taking from his haversack some of the food with which he, like his men, had been hastily furnished before leaving Kulwar.

“It is not nice,” said the child, tasting it, “but we are so hungry. Give Fanny some; and do get us some milk.”

A Native soldier, who had heard the child's words without understanding them, but saw her effort to eat the dry provisions, dismounted, and finding among the *débris* of the camp a tin flask filled with lukewarm water, handed it up to her. The prisoners looked on, a kindly expression visible in more than one face among those who were collectively if not individually, morally if not actually, accomplices in the butchery of many such helpless innocents. Darcy caught the expression, and turning to them—

“You know,” he said, “what you have deserved. You have betrayed the salt you have eaten; you have slaughtered your officers in cold blood; you have murdered, some of you, women and children like these. If I order you to be hung to the nearest trees I only do my duty. If I shoot you I give you a better death than you deserve. Thank your gods that I and those with me have not seen your work yet, or you would hardly pass alive. For your wounds you must care as you can; and remember, if you fall again into my hands or into those of any other British officer, the gallows is the best you can expect.”

Surprised by a mercy they certainly had not deserved, and which was perhaps never again shown

till the mutiny was quelled, the wretches salaamed with profound reverence.

“Sahib,” said one of them, “you meant to take our caste from us. It was only just that we should take your lives. You say we were traitors to our salt; you, or at least the other sahibs, were traitors to their men. You say we murdered them by surprise; they would have taken from us by a trick what we valued more than life.”

The spokesman was a Hindoo. Darcy turned from him indignantly to the Mahometan comrades, whose looks had approved his words.

“*You cannot talk of caste,*” he said. “*You have been false to the law of your own Prophet as to that which when you entered our service you swore to obey. Begone; it is not justice that leaves you the lives you have forfeited.*”

At sunrise the next morning, Darcy with his mixed band entered the ruined station of Sivapore. On the way he had been joined by more than a dozen of the dispersed Lancers of the 36th; but none could inform him what had been the fate of their officers or their comrades. Hastily mounting, they had been attacked, many of them slaughtered, and the rest scattered in every direction before they could form for resistance. Bitter and savage was their temper as they looked upon the ruins, often still smoking, not only of their own huts, but of the pleasant homes of the officers and civilians of the station. Not one of these had been spared; and in almost every Native house that was entered some part of their spoils was to be found. It was with no little difficulty that their

officer restrained their eagerness to avenge by indiscriminate sack and slaughter the crimes of which their countrywomen and their comrades had been the helpless victims. The more discriminating but still somewhat dubious justice that was done, where no witness could be trusted, and character rather than actual proof of complicity in particular crimes controlled the selection of examples, it would be almost as painful to describe or to read as it was to Darcy to execute. It was a pleasanter task to reward two Natives, old soldiers of the Company, in whose homes, disguised by colour and Native clothes, and hidden in the recesses of the women's rooms, three or four English children were found. It seemed that no grown woman, no English official, judge, or priest, had escaped the indiscriminate butchery. But the bodies found, identified, and buried by Native hands—many perhaps concerned in their murder—under the urgent and severe insistence of the English troopers, only represented some two-thirds of the entire number; and Darcy might hope, as may the reader, that of the rest more had escaped than had been burnt in the ruins of their houses, carried off as captives for a more deliberate and more cruel fate, or butchered at some little distance, and left to the jackals and carrion birds.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPRING OF THE TIGER.

“Day by day the Indian tiger
Louder yelled and closer crept,
Day by day the jungle serpent
Near and nearer circles swept.”

KULWAR, held in the name of the Company, might form a central point of refuge for European fugitives from a score of minor civil stations around it; while, if his retainers remained faithful to the Rajah, it might be maintained against a siege by any but a strong force of disciplined soldiers. To return thither at once was therefore Darcy's main purpose. Such of the children as could keep their seats were mounted on ponies, each led by a Native horseman. About thirty European troopers formed the advance and rear guard. Two or three children too young to sit even the quiet little animals chosen for them, were carried on the saddles of the best-mounted riders, and Darcy himself took charge of his enemy's younger child. Almost within sight of a considerable village on their route, he suddenly halted.

“I will have those cows! We'll have milk for you, little one, at any rate. Djuna Rao, take forty of

your best men, drive off the cattle, and escort the children to Kulwar. We will cover your movements if we have to fight for it."

"No, sahib," answered the young Indian. "If you are going to fight I shall be beside you."

"You will make a soldier by-and-by," Darcy answered; "but you have yet to learn a soldier's first duty. The Rajah placed you under my orders, and you must obey."

"You would not blacken my face before him for the rest of my life? I dare not return to him and say that I have left you I don't know where."

Turning to an elderly officer of the Rajah's force, who wore an English medal earned on the terrible battle-fields of the Punjaub, Darcy repeated to him the order he had given; and, drawing off forty of his comrades, the veteran prepared to obey. Darcy arranged the children's ponies in the midst of the escort, and, dismounting, lifted his own charge from the saddle.

"I must give you to this man now," he said, about to raise her to the saddle of a Native horseman. "You won't be frightened; and give me a kiss, little one."

The child shrank back. "I am not frightened to leave you; you look so ugly, with your face all over dirty blotches, and no eyebrows and eyelashes."

"For shame, Fanny!" cried her little sister. "Very likely they were burnt, like your hair. He looks like the gentleman who carried us out of our room; and he had a dress like that. Was it you, sir?" she asked, looking up into his face.

“Good-bye, child,” said Darcy, stooping to kiss her. “You will be safe under a roof to-night—to-morrow at latest. Good-bye.”

The detachment moved off, half of them escorting the children in the rear, half preparing to drive off the cattle that grazed some two miles to the right, while the village lay somewhat further to the left front of the main body, which Darcy now rejoined. The men were drawn up in two lines, the Europeans in front, where a swell in the ground hid them from the village they were approaching. It had been ascertained that a Moslem fanatic had been preaching a *jehad* or Holy War against the English throughout the district; and the turbulent population of this neighbourhood were almost certain to give trouble, and, if not taken by surprise, to offer desperate resistance to the passage of so small a force. Reaching the ridge himself, Darcy reconnoitred the scene in front through his glass.

“I thought so,” he murmured; then, riding back, “Men,” he said, “there are, I suppose, some five hundred armed Natives in our front, half of whom are mounted. We have but one thing to do. We must charge and cut through them. Remember, each one of you, you must conquer or die. Hold together; those who are cut off cannot be rescued. James, you will command the Lancers if I fall. Remember, on no account turn back! Djuna Rao, wheel to the right and break their infantry. Cut through, and on no consideration, whatever happens, halt or return. Follow up the party in charge of the cattle and children. If we get through, we shall do the same.”

Wheeling into a single line as he had commanded,

the party surmounted the ridge, and saw the enemy directly in their front a mile and a half away. They trotted forward steadily till within a couple of furlongs; then, drawing his sword for the first time with his still painful right arm, the young officer turned for a moment to his men.

“Hold together! steady; no prisoners, and no pursuit. Take care you don’t allow your pace to be checked by their fire. Follow me steadily without nearing me, and keep your dressing. James, if you reach Kulwar, remember that the Rajah commands there while he holds it for the Government. Now,—for God, for our women, and for the Queen!—Charge!”

The Natives, who had anticipated the attack, held together more steadily than might have been expected. The fire of the infantry checked for a moment the advance of the Rajah’s horsemen, and threw them behind their English comrades, who, unshaken by the hasty fire of the irregular cavalry before them, dashed on, following their leader as he rode straight at the centre of the enemy’s line, trusting to break it by the force of the collision, which for want of skill or of discipline the Natives waited to receive. Halted cavalry seldom resists such a charge. The Lancers broke through the wavering line, scattering in every direction those in their front. But they were of course enormously outflanked on either side, and of those who had been untouched by the charge many turned upon assailants disordered and broken by the force of their own attack. Darcy, who had ridden directly against a small group that, in the centre of their line,

stood firmly while all around them gave way or were hurled to the ground, was checked and almost overthrown by the shock; and in another moment found himself behind his men, Afzul and a trooper alone beside him, engaged with half a score of Natives, chief among whom was the fanatic of whom he had heard so much during the last few eventful days. His light helmet cloven at a single stroke, saved only by the epaulette from a cut which would have severed his arm from the shoulder, it was all he could achieve to make his sword guard his life even for a few moments, and to die as became a British soldier, dealing death among his opponents. Three or four of these had fallen; but the trooper on his right had dropped from the saddle, his neck half severed by the razor edge of a Native sword; and Afzul, engaged with three opponents at once, was unable to render any aid to his master. The powerful arm of the Mussulman, which had already inflicted one wound, was raised to cleave the unprotected head, while Darcy's sword was fully occupied in parrying the blows rained at him from the left by an almost equally formidable adversary; and the enemy on the flanks, wheeling round on the rear, were almost within range of spear and sword—when a fierce shout in front diverted for a moment the attention of those whose backs were turned to the direction from which it came. Availing himself on the instant of the advantage thus given, Darcy with a back stroke disabled the sword-arm of his chief adversary, and, aiming the point directly at the face of the other, hurled him wounded and blinded from his saddle. At the next moment his troopers, charging

back, in equal disregard of his command and their own lives, to his assistance, broke and dispersed the mob of horsemen around him ; and so cleared the space in the middle of the field, that they were able partially to form and ride off with their rescued leader before the enemy could rally. The havoc inflicted on the one wing by the English Lancers, on the other by the scarcely less desperate charge of the Rajah's retainers, had left them no courage to pursue. When the English band drew bridle half a mile from the scene of conflict, Darcy looked around for Afzul. This veteran warrior, a little in the rear, dragged by the bridle at full gallop a mounted prisoner, in whom, as they came up, his master recognized the leader of the enemy, the fanatic whose preaching had gathered and whose example had encouraged the force with so much difficulty defeated.

“I wish you had not taken him, Afzul,” said Darcy, in English. “I am afraid we have now no choice. Dismount,” he said to the prisoner ; who obeyed with all the calm fortitude of an Asiatic, knowing that resistance is hopeless and his fate independent of his own will, and all the stern resignation of a Moslem warrior, believing that the blood of the infidel ensures his own easy and immediate passage to Paradise.

“Abdallah Khan,” said Darcy to the captive, whom he knew well by name and repute, “you know, if I had fallen into your hands, what my fate would have been. You have fought like a man, and it is not because you would have butchered us in cold blood that we should follow a bad example. But you are not only a rebel, you have been the preacher and

prompter of rebellion ; you have brought hundreds of men to aid in mutiny and massacre ; and but two days ago I had the painful duty of hanging more than twenty wretches who, but for you and such as you, would never have murdered women and children, or burnt and plundered our dwellings. You know as well as I that in a war like this there can be no making of prisoners on either side. To let you go would be treason to my Government, and cruelty to those whom you would lead into crime and terrible punishment. Make your peace with God in five minutes. Dismount, half a dozen of you. Unslung carbines."

"Sahib," replied the Mussulman, sternly, "you are right. You cannot afford to let me go. I should have sent you to Hell ; you send me to Paradise ; and it is not for me to complain. The infidel blood I have shed makes my peace. Fire at once ; you will send me to glory and to happiness."

"I hope so," said Darcy, sadly. "Kneel or stand as you will," as the fanatic, wounded as he was, drew himself sternly up, facing the carbines levelled at six paces distance. "Make ready. Present." His voice wavered so that the last word was hardly audible. It was obeyed, however, and the prisoner, springing into the air, fell dead at once, pierced through heart and brain.

"This is hateful work," thought Darcy, as he resumed his place at the head of his men, "and this is the sort of war we shall have for a year to come. One can scarcely wish to live to share much more of it."

A few miles from Kulwar the force passed within sight of a mango grove, and Darcy again halted them.

“We may have thirst and fever yonder,” he said to James, who rode next to him. “I will have as many of yonder fruits as all our horses can carry.”

Thus laden, the party somewhat later drew up in front of the fortress, where already a thick rampart of earth was being raised to strengthen the outer wall. Embrasures had been pierced at its summit, and carefully guarded with fascines and bags of earth to protect the gunners from musket fire, and from the splinters of stone sure to be scattered around if even small guns should be brought to bear. The gates were thrown open and they entered, the Rajah himself standing in the courtyard to greet their return.

“I thank your Highness heartily,” said Darcy, “for the service your men have rendered. I promise you that both your fidelity and the gallantry and conduct of your nephew shall be fully reported to Government, if I live; and if not, you shall have under my hand an account of all that has been done, to present to the authorities when British rule is restored.”

“I am glad,” said the Rajah, “that the young man has done his duty. And now, when you have rested and taken food, will you go round our works and see whether you approve what, under your friend’s directions, we have done? My people without have been induced to work hard at the rampart; but when they see your colours on the wall there is scarcely one outside the fortress on whom we can depend.”

“We ought,” replied Darcy, “to burn the village.

The houses would afford cover to a hostile force that might cost us dear."

"As you will; but it will turn all my subjects against me, that I burn their homes while they are loyal to me, to please an officer of the British Government."

"Well, we shall probably have notice in time to do it before we are attacked; and, after all, your cannon will command them. But, Rajah, we cannot afford to lose lives needlessly. As to the colours, hoist your own flag on the highest point of the palace. We cannot, as you know, hoist either the Company's or the Queen's below it; but, with your permission, I will take command on this side, and when attacked we will fix the Queen's flag where her soldiers are stationed."

The Rajah's face showed no little gratification at this deference to the pride and punctilious feeling of a Native Chief. Perhaps, by this mark of soldierly respect and consideration, Darcy did more to reconcile him to the cause to which he had agreed to adhere, and to win his personal attachment, than by all the promises of reward and honour he could have lavished.

It was no part of the young soldier's purpose to remain shut up in the fortress until absolutely driven in by superior force. For the next fortnight he was constantly in the saddle, with his English troopers and a more or less numerous body of the Rajah's horsemen, scouring the country, dispersing tumultuous levies, rescuing quiet villages from plunderers, asserting and enforcing the British authority over a range of more than thirty miles, and bringing in provisions

and ammunition wherever they might be found. A careful inspection of the fortifications in company with Von Arnheim had satisfied him that the place was on three sides almost unassailable, on the fourth capable of defence against any attack that there was present reason to apprehend. But even field guns might so batter the wall as to render the earth-rampart and its backing of stone the only defence on that side, while the upper part of the building, knocked in and shattered by balls, would be the chief source of danger to the defenders. In the caves below only could safety be found for women, children, and wounded men. These would be proof even against shell fire, which would destroy very speedily the remainder of a fortress built before artillery had become a formidable arm in Indian sieges.

Returning from one of these expeditions, after a brief interview with the Rajah, Darcy sought the room at the entrance of the zenana assigned to the English ladies. With these Zela, at the intercession of Miss Kavanagh, who had learnt from her the story of her own and her mother's friendship with Darcy, was then seated, though at some distance from Lady Helen and her younger daughter. The elder, rather perhaps from regard for her protector than from personal sympathy with the young Eurasian, had seated herself beside her, and drawn Zela into a hesitating and broken conversation.

"Lady Helen," said Darcy to the widow, who had gradually recovered to some extent her self-possession and interest in passing incidents, "I must ask you to prepare as quickly as possible to leave these rooms

and take shelter in the caves below. We are about to be besieged, and besieged by a formidable force. The Nawab of Arzabad, a personal enemy of the Rajah as well as a disaffected vassal of the Company, has gathered all his own retainers, and all the malcontents and loose warlike portion of the population for fifty miles around; and has persuaded, they say, some regiments of mutineers to join him in an attack on this place. I have only one fear, and that is for water. In Heaven's name employ all your influence to economize as far as possible the use of this among the women. *We* shall waste none. The fruit I have gathered may serve to relieve the thirst of children or of wounded men, with as little consumption as possible of that which we cannot replace, and the want of which if it should be exhausted will compel us to surrender. While we can keep the cows alive you will have some milk at least for the little ones. And, Lady Helen, your word will carry weight. If I am not alive when you are rescued, do justice to the faith of the Prince to whom we owe everything, and who would, had he been in time, have saved your husband."

The lady shivered at the last name; but it roused her to speak, though with a manifest effort.

"I have not yet given you a word of thanks," she said, "but do not think I have seen or remembered nothing. For the comfort given to him in his last moments, for the lives of these children at least, may the Father of the fatherless remember and reward you!"

"But for thirst," observed Darcy, after a pause, "we

have, I think, little to fear. Their fire may knock the buildings to pieces and make a terrible noise; but remember that the noise means nothing. The caves are perfectly safe. Good-bye, then, for the present."

Miss Kavanagh put out her hand to stop him as he was turning from the room.

"You can hold out?"

"While the water holds out," Darcy answered, strangely moved by the light touch of the fingers laid upon his own. "Zela, don't make me ashamed of you by screaming when the firing begins. They may go on for a month, but they cannot by any possibility reach you in the caves."

"But you?" cried Zela, eagerly. "They will be shooting at you, and if they knock down the buildings they will crush you."

"I hope not," said Darcy, quietly. "But if they do"—and, holding her hand, he drew her apart—"if they do, remember you are an English and a Christian girl. Don't let me have worked for nothing this last year."

She would not release the hand he would have withdrawn from her clasp. "I will remember," she answered almost in a whisper. "But let me know that you are safe. When for a whole day I do not hear of you I shall think you are . . ." She could not speak the word.

"You must try not to think, my child. They will make a terrible noise; but we are all under cover, and not one shot in ten kills or wounds anybody. But in the worst case nobody will miss me so much

as you will. Now let me go, Zela; I have not a moment to spare."

A wild noise without, shrill, loud, tumultuous, savage beyond expression—

"As all the fiends from Heaven that fell
Had pealed the banner-cry of Hell"—

startled them; and, instantly releasing himself, Darcy hurried to the wall in front, where his men, whom for some time he had been carefully training to the management of the cannon (scarcely two of them of the same calibre or fashion) stood steadily to their loaded pieces with lighted matches. Above them waved a small Union Jack, the regimental colours being of course with the head-quarters of the Lancers. The village, whose nearest houses were perhaps a hundred yards from the moat, and all the ground around, was occupied by a tumultuous array of armed Natives. In the rear of these Darcy's eye discerned the well-known uniform of Sepoy regiments:—two or three squadrons of cavalry, three or four battalions of infantry, and, as he feared, more than one battery of artillery. The guns, however, were not to be seen; it was only by their accoutrements and uniform that, in his hasty glance, he distinguished that most formidable arm of the service. In front, a Native Mahometan Chief, with two or three attendants, one of whom carried a white scarf attached to a spear, sat on horseback.

"Will you surrender?" cried the leader; "and we will spare the lives of all Natives within the garrison. If you refuse, we will take your fortress and leave none of you alive."

“It is for you to answer, Rajah,” Darcy said to the Chief, who stood beside him.

Much pleased by this fresh mark of respect, the Prince showed himself above the parapet of the earthen rampart.

“Dog!” he said, “and son of dogs! You and yours cannot remember the history of a House like mine. But there are some among your followers who could tell you that none of my fathers ever betrayed a guest; and if these English were my enemies and not my allies, I would not give them up to such as you are.”

“Back out of range!” cried Darcy, springing up; “back! for in another minute we fire upon you.”

The Nawab and his attendants turned and rode back with more haste than dignity till they were screened by the ranks of their followers. Then a sputtering volley beat upon the walls, and a few bullets entered the embrasures, but wholly without effect.

“Pass the word!” said Darcy. “Are you all ready with your guns? Those trained on the houses and the street?”

“All ready.”

“Fire!”

The signal meant more than was known to most of those who obeyed it. The flash and crash of the guns was followed in a second by the outburst of a sheet of flame that seemed to reach to Heaven, and a roar louder than the loudest tropical thunder-peal. A few minutes passed before the cloud of thick black smoke that ensued had so far rolled away as to

permit the defenders to discern, where the village had stood, some heaps of burning ruins, and where the front of the assailants had been piles of mangled corpses, and fragments of forms that had once been human. Reflection had suggested to the young officer a better plan than the burning of the village or its destruction by cannon; and mines, laid at night by his own men, with the knowledge only of the Rajah and two or three of his most trustworthy adherents, had prepared a fearful destruction for those who should endeavour to avail themselves of the cover afforded by the Native dwellings, from which their inhabitants had been the day before expelled. The tumultuary levies of the Nawab were in full flight; the mutineers stood to their arms at a distance, but confused and almost panic-stricken.

“It will take some time to bring them up again,” said the Rajah, coolly. “That was well done, Lieutenant Darcy; well planned and well carried out. Yonder dog will not bark quite so loudly next time he comes within range of our fire.”

“He won’t come again, while we have water,” Darcy answered in a low tone. “I told you, Rajah, I had no fear of fire; it is on the other element that our fate depends.”

Rumour speedily carried to the Native women sheltered in the vast inner chambers of the cave-temple the explanation of the terrific crash they had heard and the flame whose bright glare had been visible for a moment through the chinks by which their chambers were half-lighted, and even by reflection from the sides of the outer caverns. Zela’s face

flushed, her eyes brightened with pride and delight, as her mother repeated in a few words what she had heard from her companions of the zenana.

“You are proud of your friend?” Miss Kavanagh said, interpreting truly the sudden change of expression in a countenance which a few seconds before had been pale with fear, in eyes that had been but too manifestly full of tears. “What is it that he has done?”

“He has blown up the village and all the *budmashes* who had taken it. Ah, lady, I may well be proud that such as he cared to be the friend and teacher of one whom your mother thinks unworthy to touch the hem of her robe. I had rather have been the slave of Darcy sahib than the wife of any Maharajah in India, or any Burra Sahib at Calcutta.”

A lighter colour tinged the cheek, a less perceptible light brightened the eyes of the listener, as she turned to repeat the explanation to her mother. The feat was still the subject of discourse among the women, and the elder children had drawn near to inquire, sympathizing in if they could not fully understand the satisfaction and exultation of their elders—when a terrific crash above was answered by a chorus of screams from their midst. Only Lady Helen and her elder daughter remained silent and comparatively calm; and the latter, looking at Zela, saw that the Eurasian had crouched to the ground, hiding her face in her robe.

“Courage, Zela,” she said, kindly; “that was only what Lieutenant Darcy told us to expect, and it cannot hurt us here.”

“Us!” cried the Eurasian, suddenly raising her head and looking her young consoler straight in the face. “Do you think of nothing but yourselves? you whom he saved so lately! No, it cannot hurt us, but it may have killed *him*.”

Another and another heavy crash followed, till even the English ladies began to fear that the terrors of their companions might be but too well founded. The guns of the defenders answered steadily and continuously; but none of those in the vaults had the knowledge or the calmness to distinguish the fact or to understand its significance, while the thundering fall of heavy masses of stone deafened their ears to all other sounds and left them no nerve for conjecture. But even to such terrors as these women—yes, and children too—become speedily accustomed. Before two hours had elapsed after the opening of the enemy’s fire, Miss Kavanagh had so far recovered nerve and confidence as to venture into one of the outer caves, and approach a Native soldier who seemed in command at its mouth.

“What is happening in front?” she inquired, “and why are you doing nothing?” as she noticed that the retainers squatted on the ground beside their cannon, their arms ready to hand, indeed, and the match held in the hand of one of them, but without an attempt to fire. The man salaamed courteously, but evidently understood little of her question. She pointed to the gun and the inactive loungers around.

“See, Mem sahib,” the soldier said, pointing to the embrasure. Venturing thither and leaning over the gun, the young lady perceived that her station over-

hung a precipice some forty feet in depth, at whose foot stretched an extensive plain. To the left she could just discern the edge of the slope by which the fortress-palace was accessible in front; and in the distance the extreme left of the besiegers, where a crowd of the Nawab's followers were gathered out of danger from the lower embrasures of the defenders. As yet the place was attacked only on the more accessible side. At that moment, a heavy report was attended by a slight shock to the ground on which they stood, followed by another, another, and yet another.

"Rajah guns," said the Native, pointing upwards; "Nawab guns," as a succession of reports from without were followed by another crash in the upper stories of the palace.

"I think I understand," the girl said, returning to her mother and speaking loudly enough to be heard by Zela, who now sat near the Ranee's Native companions in the further corner of the great chamber. "Our guns in the front are firing still, and the men down here do not move, so that those in front cannot be hard pressed. But the enemy have artillery, and it sounds much louder than ours. I am afraid their guns are what Papa called heavier."

"No," replied Lady Helen, as a tremendous report in a direction from which nothing had as yet been heard was accompanied by a species of earthquake, penetrating even to that depth in the solid rock, "that is one of our guns, and a very heavy one indeed, and there goes another in the front."

The fact was that hitherto the defenders had fired chiefly with grape and canister, or with stones, brick-

bats, and other like substitutes, at enemies within range of such missiles, and with light charges. Now, having driven off all such assailants, they were endeavouring to silence the nine-pound and eighteen-pound pieces which the mutineer artillerists had brought into dangerous proximity to the fortress, unaware of or despising the power of its cannon or the skill of those who used them. None of the latter had any experience or training in the management of artillery; but Darcy, Arnheim, and James, profiting by that education which enables men quickly to adapt themselves to new circumstances, and to learn promptly whatever they desire to learn, observed where and when their shot fell short or went wide of its mark, and were finding out how by rule of thumb to give the required elevation to such of the pieces mounted on the wall as could be properly trained with the appliances at their command. Before night-fall the besiegers had found it expedient to withdraw their artillery to a greater distance, and to suspend operations till they could protect it by regular field works. Immediately after the evening meal had been served in the subterranean chambers, Darcy, who had gone the round of the defences, entered that in which the ladies were gathered. As matter of course he approached and addressed Lady Helen. But her daughter observed that his eyes had first sought out Zela, and noted in her attitude and manner that she had recovered from the terror inspired by the noise and confusion above.

“We have driven them back,” he said, “and for the night I think we shall have quiet. But to-

morrow or next day they will reopen their fire, and probably knock the whole place about our ears."

"Oh dear!" cried the younger girl, "and what is to become of us then?"

"Don't be foolish, Helen," her mother said. "You are old enough to learn that men who are doing their best for us must not be harassed by the fears of women and children. We have our courage and our duty as they have theirs."

"Miss Helen's question is worth an answer, though," said Darcy, wishing to soften the reproof. "It is just when they have done knocking the buildings to pieces that we shall be safest. Their balls have not hurt half a dozen men; the stones they have knocked down have killed or wounded twice that number. Even in front the wall is our worst danger; and were it not for the difficulty and the risk, and that it might fill up the moat and contribute to facilitate an assault, I should be disposed to blow up the whole of it above the earthen rampart. Don't be frightened if you hear more crashing during the night; we are going to pull down many of the most dangerous portions of the ruin. Miss Kavanagh, I wish all the frightened creatures here were as steady and cool as you seem. If you can keep the children occupied and amused, they will soon learn to hear without alarm and scarcely to notice sounds which, as experience will teach them, bring no danger to them."

"I will do my best," she replied. "Mr. Darcy, are they dividing the water into rations? They seem to give it us without regard to quantity."

“Thank you,” he returned, earnestly. “I had forgotten that, and your thoughtful recollection of it puts my neglect of so important a point to shame.”

“You have something else to think of,” she answered. “And they have brought down some of the wounded into the next cave. Cannot we help to nurse them?”

“I am afraid you can do nothing for the Natives. Their prejudices are too strongly rooted to be safely disregarded even at a time like this. But I will have our own wounded placed apart; and for them I will ask you to do all you can. We can spare no hands to do more than carry them beyond reach of fire.”

“And I,” said Zela, timidly, coming up to him. “May I help Miss Kavanagh?”

“You must ask her,” Darcy replied; turning, however, upon the young lady a look which appealed to natural good feeling against the prejudices of race and caste.

“Of course,” replied the latter, “Miss Manton shall share my work, whatever part my mother may assign to me.”

At a slight sign from Darcy, the young lady followed him to the entrance of that outer chamber in which he proposed to lodge the English wounded.

“I thank you,” he said, “more than you can understand, for that poor child. I have a father and a sister at home, and both are very dear to me; but they will only be grieved if I fall. Zela’s future, it seems to me, may depend on my life. Miss Kavanagh, if you think I have rendered you any service, repay it to her when I can serve her no longer.”

Intently as his eyes were fixed on her face, Darcy failed to understand the rising colour and the look of pain, if such it were, visible for a moment in the eyes of the young maiden before they were veiled by the drooping lids.

“We cannot forget our debt, and I will do, my mother will do, what we can,” she answered. “She shall understand, if anything befall you, that Zela is your legacy to us. Are you content?”

“I thank you. But for what you have said, her fate would have weighed heavily on my heart at the last. And now—I have work till daylight, at any rate—good night.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE LION AT BAY.

“Hushed the wounded man his groaning,
Hushed the wife her little ones;
Alone they heard the drum roll
And the roar of Sepoy guns.”

THE Sepoy artillerists, pressing into their service the Natives, armed and unarmed, for miles around, laboured during the whole of that night at the construction of effective batteries bearing upon the most vulnerable parts of the fortress, and so situate as to be comparatively safe from the return fire. The moon, breaking from a cloud, shone brightly over the ground, marking out very distinctly the shadow cast by a group of trees some hundred yards in front.

“Soubahdar,” suddenly said a sentry, coming up to the Native officer who directed the operations, “there is a shadow that moves under those trees.”

“Take ten men with you, and see what it is. If you can make a European prisoner, bring him in alive at any cost.”

But the moment that the noiseless party stole from the trench, and their figures were relieved in the moonlight against the dark background of the rampart, two men, springing on their feet, mounted

horses that had during the obscurity reached the place where the trees screened them from the returning light of the moon, and rode at full speed for the fortress. A shower of bullets rained around them as they passed along the front of the Native lines for nearly the whole distance. But when, crossing the drawbridge two hundred yards in advance of the nearest horseman who pursued them, they entered the open gate and heard it clang behind them, both sprang unhurt to the ground.

“I know their plan and their lines now, Rajah,” said Darcy to the Native Chief, who approached to learn the result of the perilous reconnaissance, while his companion Afzul removed the horses. “I am afraid they are too strong for a sortie, and, having discovered us, there is no chance of a surprise; but I shall know how to direct our fire even by night. We will disturb them now.”

Accordingly, the guns of the besieged opened fire, and the Natives in the outer caves, weary of inaction, were delighted that they could play their part in this work. But steadily and to good purpose as their fire was maintained, it failed to prevent, though it interrupted not a little, the work of entrenchment. When the level sun so shone as to mark most distinctly by its shadow the line of the Sepoys' rampart, Darcy perceived that all his fire, directed by the knowledge acquired at such a risk, had effected was to delay for a few hours the opening of the enemy's batteries; for the slaughter of a score or two in a force so numerous and of such worthless material as that besieging him was hardly worth the expenditure of powder and shot.

It would be useless and wearisome to recount the daily details of the siege. Enough that for weeks the firing from without was unceasingly maintained, till the whole of the ancient and extensive buildings, with the exception of the outer wall protected by its earthen rampart, had been knocked into shapeless ruins. This, however, as Darcy had predicted, was a service to the defenders, who were now no longer exposed to the fall of heavy masses or the shower of fragments from above wherever an enemy's shot might strike, while the ruinous heaps formed a rampart quite strong enough to screen them from direct fire. Two considerations only harassed incessantly the mind of the young officer who, under the nominal command of the Rajah, was the life, soul, and mind of the defence. Firing constantly by day, bringing to bear unlimited supplies of enforced labour by night, the Sepoys had constructed battery after battery nearer and nearer to the place, more and more strongly protected; never removing their guns from one till the next was ready to receive them. At short range, even the earthen rampart would not prove a sufficient protection, and, a breach once made, it would be easy to fill the moat with faggots, sacks, or earth; when, in hand-to-hand fighting, numbers must ere long prevail. If an assault could be delivered at short distance, prepared by a heavy fire from guns at a point which the Sepoys were evidently bent on occupying, the result could hardly be doubtful. Again, it was clear that the water supply was approaching exhaustion. The well, carefully sounded each day, was reported every evening some inch or two lower

than the night before. The supply doled out was barely sufficient for health in such a climate; and though the Natives showed a signal generosity in stinting themselves for the benefit of their European comrades, of the ladies, children, and wounded, the latter felt their privations severely now that milk was no longer to be had, the stock of fruit waning, and the water barely sufficient to quench natural thirst, much less that of confinement, fatigue, and fever induced by mental and bodily suffering.'

The time rolled on; the sufferings of the besieged increasing, their hopes waning, as day by day the supply of water grew less, and the enemy, established on what in a systematically conducted attack would have been called their last parallel, had already beaten an almost practicable breach in the earthen rampart and the wall of stone that backed it. Darcy, who had been more than once wounded, though not disabled, suffered more from the consequent fever than from the pain itself. He had paid a visit to the ladies, from whom he had studiously concealed the extent and imminence of the danger; and returned pained to the heart by the fretting of the children—begging for more water, and torturing both English and Native mothers by the necessity of refusal—even more than by the silent endurance of the wounded, whose dry, cracked lips bore witness to the need whereof they would not speak. But for the supplies of fruit so thoughtfully collected, the suffering of all would have been by this time unendurable. Darcy had shared one half his own evening draught between a badly wounded Native, who could scarcely be brought

to accept it, and the little Fanny, who had become reconciled to and even fond of him as time had replaced the burnt eyebrows, lashes, and moustache, and healed the scars of the fire. To Zela it was vain to offer such a boon. Indeed, she had saved repeatedly her own share of fruit, and on one or two occasions had forced him to accept a small portion, lest his persistent refusal should cause her more suffering than could the privation she shared with all around her. As he reached the courtyard, the expression of hope and satisfaction on the grave faces of Von Arnheim and the Rajah surprised and encouraged him. Before them stood, almost naked, a Native youth, little more than a boy. The white cloth around his loins, his sole garment, was soaked in blood that still trickled from a wound in the hip, received from a musket ball of an enemy's sentry who had seen him as he scrambled up the ruins at perhaps the one point accessible to a good climber, on one of the rocky fronts which the enemy did not attempt to assault, but which were now closely invested.

“Lieutenant Darcy,” said the Rajah, “I think you may trust this boy's report. He is the son of my grandfather's daughter, and of a father who served with distinction in one of your own Irregular corps. Now, repeat to the sahib what you have just told us.”

“It was full a hundred miles from here,” said the boy, “that I fell in a week ago with British soldiers. There were some hundreds of them, and the officer at their head wore a uniform like that I have seen the sahib wear” (for Darcy, like his men, had now discarded their too distinctive uniform for clothes more

resembling those of the Natives, and not marking them out as Europeans to the especial aim of the enemy). "He said: 'Tell the Rajah and tell the sahibs that Vane will come to their help if they can hold out for a fortnight longer, perhaps before.' "

"Did you tell him," said Darcy, "how many were besieging us? And had he any guns?"

"I saw no guns, sahib. I told him there were *lakhs* of men about the place, and he laughed. He asked how many of them were in red coats, and I told him about half a *lakh*." [Fifty thousand.]

"If he believes that," observed Darcy, laughing, "we shall have to wait for our rescue."

"He knows," said Von Arnheim, "that Natives so young as this boy have no idea of numbers. My boy, you have done well. You will live to be a brave and distinguished soldier."

"Your name?" said Darcy; and, receiving it from the boy, who in the praise and notice of the sahibs had forgotten the pain of his wound: "If we live to be rescued, you shall have honour and reward worthy of what you have done. You have served us as well as the cleverest and bravest man could have done after years of experience in war."

Whether or no the enemy had received similar tidings, it was manifest that the attack was pushed on with increasing urgency, and on the fourth day after the boy's arrival all was evidently prepared for an assault. The breach was wide, the slope of the fallen stones and earth easy, the cover for the defenders so deficient that to serve the guns under the constant fire of the enemy's musketry cost a life for almost

every volley. At last Darcy forbade the further serving of those guns which were most exposed, bidding the men load them with grape and train them on the breach ; giving every man, Native and European, his post along the wall, and leaving to guard the cave embrasures and the rocky steeps only as many as might prevent the escalade that no more than three or four daring enemies at once might attempt. Then placing the sentries, he bade all who were not required for duty lie down for sleep immediately under the outer wall till called actually to defend their lines, and descended himself to seek a last interview with his countrywomen.

"Lady Helen," he said, "take this," handing her a loaded revolver. "Do not use it till the enemy actually set foot in this room, but for your daughters' sake and your own use it then. Zela, it is to please me you have always dressed almost like an English child. Dress now as your mother's daughter. Whatever your fate, it will be at worst the same as that of the Rajah's house. *Our* women have worse to expect if they fall into the hands of such as the Nawab or his followers."

"No !" cried Zela, indignantly. "I will not dress like the wives and daughters of those who are going to kill you. And that young lady has been kind to me : I don't wish to fare better than she does. You will let me stay by you, Miss Kavanagh ?" she asked, turning to the young maiden, who, pale but calm, had drawn close to her mother's side. "You will let me die at your feet, as you have let me stay beside you in these long dreadful days ?"

“Then,” said Darcy, calmly, “Lady Helen—you will do by this child as by your own?”

The widow bent her head in assent.

“The last struggle may come at any moment now; and also rescue may come at any moment; but if the enemy enter these caves the rescue will come too late. However, you must judge for yourselves. They will not set foot here while one of us is alive.”

Exchanging a silent earnest pressure of the hand with each of his countrywomen, and kissing those of the children who clustered round, among whose looks of wonder and fear the most earnest, anxious, and intelligent was that of the little Minnie Thomson, he bent over Zela, to whom, more than to any but one other, his heart was drawn at that terrible moment.

“Farewell, my pupil. If we do not meet again here, God grant we may meet elsewhere.”

“And soon,” she answered. “If you do not return, Mr. Darcy, I shall not stay.”

He bent to kiss her brow; but, all reserve of habit and training broken through by the violence of emotion, she sprang up so that his lips met her own. There was nothing beyond earnest kindness in his kiss; perhaps almost as little in hers, for all other feelings were absorbed in the awful anticipations of the hour. Turning from her, his eyes met what seemed to him a look of painful reproach in those of the one person in that assembly whose censure or approval could have affected him. But he found, perhaps sought, no words of self-defence or excuse; only, answering Miss Kavanagh's look with one as bright and direct as a clear conscience could give, he

took her hand in his, and slightly bent his knee as he lifted it to his lips.

“*Morituri te salutant,*” he said.

The act and words expressed an appropriate and dignified answer to her tacit rebuke, almost as much as a farewell to one whose displeasure he could not easily endure ; and he observed with surprised interest even at that moment that both were evidently understood. Well read in history, if not familiar with the language, Alice Kavanagh had been impressed by, and remembered since she first read it, the salute of the gladiators to the Emperors who sent them to a useless and unworthy death.

“God send it be not so,” she replied. “But if it be His will, such a death might fully atone all the errors of a life less honourable than yours can have been. I trust—*whatever happens*—we may hope to meet again before long.”

Returning to his post, Darcy flung himself down among his sleeping men, having learnt already the soldier’s art of sleeping at will amid the worst and most threatening dangers which for the moment no exertion of his own was required or could avail to meet. He had slept for some hours, and the sun was near setting, when the reopened fire of the enemy, crashing over their heads and shattering the stones, roused him and all the defenders. They took their places in stern and resolute silence.

“Pick out their chiefs,” said Darcy, quietly, “as they come on, and don’t waste a shot.”

The English were drawn up immediately on either side of the breach, ready at the moment of attack to

form line across it for defence. All that could be done to render it difficult and impracticable had been done; but all the artificial obstructions were now shattered in a few minutes. The white turbans and dusky faces of the assaulting force were visible a few yards in rear of their guns. When the defences of the breach were beaten to pieces, the fire of the Natives ceased. A gallant young Mussulman sprang forward in their front, and with a yell of "*Deen!*" the whole body, ten deep, and lining the entire slope, rushed forward. As they reached the edge of the moat the guns poured into them a volley of regular grape-shot, reserved for this critical moment, which staggered and checked them. Then Darcy leaped to his place in front of his men and in the very centre of the slope of ruins. Behind the English line of bayonets and loaded carbines were ranged as many Natives with weapons equally formidable in close assault. The remainder of the Rajah's force held the shattered wall on either side, firing slowly and steadily into the mass that filled the moat, and upon which every shot told, but with little or no effect upon their advance. As the enemy's leader set foot on the bottom of the breach, Darcy levelled the revolver he held in his left hand. "He carries all our lives in his," he muttered, as with steady wrist he sent his bullet through the heart of one who in feeling, in purpose, in conscience, and in the estimate of his followers, was as true a hero as his antagonist.

The fall of their leader staggered the assailants for a moment; but those in front were borne on by the rush of those behind. The volley of the carbines

swept away the whole of their front rank, but caused no check, and the second rank were in another instant fighting hand to hand with the defenders of the breach. They could not, however, force the steady line of bayonets, held firmly by the strong hands of the Englishmen, who stood shoulder to shoulder; fighting not only for life but for the honour of their country and of their regiment, and for objects that were dearer than either. A more desperate or savage conflict never roused the bitterest passions of both parties. The swinging swords, the spears thrust or flung by the Natives, were less effective to force a passage than the unbroken immovable line of bayonets to resist it; and, under the Rajah's directions, the line of defence formed by his own retainers steadily reloaded their pieces while the fight continued within a spear-length of their muzzles, and poured a volley between the heads of the men in front into the attacking force.

Fighting at first a step or two in advance of his men, Darcy had been forced back by sheer pressure into their ranks, and now held a lance, as the most effective weapon, in the midst of the bayonets which, gathered at Sivapore, had by his direction been attached to the carbines of the Lancers. After piercing two or three of the enemy who were thrust upon it by those behind them, this weapon was wrenched from his grasp; but with the revolver in one hand and the sword in the other he trusted to sell his life as dearly as any of those around him. Almost every man in the front line was wounded more or less severely; but not one moved, under

whatever impulse or provocation, his weapon from the line whose evenness it had been the special charge and care of their chief to preserve. None of them consequently could aid him when, his revolver exhausted, two swords at once clashing with his own, a spear was flung with deadly aim at his defenceless breast. But Von Arnheim, who, sword in hand, had taken his place where one of the wounded fell, caught the weapon on his own and struck it aside when within a few inches of his friend's heart.

The rush, however, prevailed at last by sheer weight, and pressed the defenders backward to and almost over the ledge of earth and broken stone that afforded their last foothold, between the slope of the ascent without and that formed by the shot-shattered ruins which fell still more steeply into the courtyard behind.

"Stand fast, men," said Darcy. "Driven back from this, all is over;" and as he spoke he cut down another of those fanatical Mahometans who, inspired by a warlike and undoubting faith, gave whatever courage and cohesion it possessed to the attack as to the rebellion in general. Darcy, his sword striking deep into the shoulder of the falling man, was for a moment held fast, and in that moment a cut from the tulwar of the next assailant laid his sword-arm open to the bone. A spear entered his breast, a bullet pierced his thigh, and finally a blow on the head from the butt end of a long, old-fashioned Native firelock hurled him backward, powerless and senseless. The Rajah, springing through the gap left, sent the spear

he held through the heart of him who had struck the first blow at his friend, and with his long sharp two-edged sword almost hewed from the shoulders the head of the next assailant. But the defenders were now forced back inch by inch till the whole summit of the breach was in the hands of the enemy.

“Our last hope,” cried the Rajah, in Hindoostanee. “Fire!”

Nothing followed for some seconds, and, with a contemptuous shout, the assailants pressed on, having killed or disabled two-thirds of the English defenders, and driving before them the disheartened Natives, who, but for the presence and the desperate courage of their beloved Chief, would have given way at once.

“Djuna!” shouted the Rajah, “are you fool or traitor? Fire!”

But almost before he spoke the answer was given. A sullen rumble, a flash and roar! The defenders were hurled backwards into the courtyard, followed involuntarily by more than their own number of the assailants. The remainder of the attacking column upon the breach had felt suddenly aware of some unknown peril, had halted in confusion and dismay. A thunder-peal and flash that illuminated the whole twilight sky for miles around! The ruins that formed the ascent of the breach were blown to pieces, the assailants upon it hurled into the air, the moat filled with fragments of stone and of human bodies, with dead and dying men.

The assault was at an end; and with some difficulty the Rajah, recovering from the shock which had stunned him, gathered his followers together before

the enemy became aware that even after their defeat they were within the courtyard more numerous than its defenders. Too confounded and terrified, however, to fight, they were instantly cut down, and the Native Prince reascended the shattered wall of his fortress to see that for the present it was safe ; that the enemy were in full flight, and not an unwounded man left within range of the defenders' fire.

CHAPTER X.

LOYAL—À MORT.

“Thou hast done well, my servant;
Ask and receive thy reward.”

It was noon on the next day before the anxious care with which, relieving guard at intervals on his pallet, Alice Kavanagh and Zela had watched the almost unconscious but intense suffering of their wounded friend was rewarded by signs of returning sensibility. The English face of the former bending over him appeared to recal dim remembrances of another climate and widely different circumstances, for his first words showed no recollection of the scenes through which he had lately passed.

“Thank you, Amy,” he murmured; “but my head aches worse than ever. No, dear, your hand is hot and this handkerchief pains me”—trying to move his right arm in the effort to take the bandage from his wounded head. His inability to lift the arm probably awakened him to thought and consciousness, for when he next spoke it was to refuse the water with which Alice endeavoured to quench the thirst manifested by the parched lips and difficult breathing.

“No, we have none to spare; and the children want it more than we.”

Then at last, fairly opening his eyes, he looked around him with a glance that realized the scene at once. He made a desperate effort to rise, but in vain, and sank back at last, fully aware of his weakness and recalling all that had passed.

“What has happened? Have they stormed the place, and are we prisoners?”

The movement deepened and freshened the dark crimson stains on the bandages that covered his wounds; and the girl, much alarmed, placed her hand lightly on his unwounded shoulder to restrain any further exertion.

“Hush!” she said. “Don’t try to speak or move, and I will tell you. But drink this water; we have plenty.”

She could only force a few mouthfuls on her reluctant patient; and when these were swallowed she spoke again.

“The breach, they say, was blown up, and the enemy driven off. We heard the roar and saw the reflection of the fire. Since then they have been almost quiet; we have not heard another shot from without.”

“What can that mean?” murmured Darcy. “Is it you, Miss Kavanagh? Perhaps, if they are not firing, Von Arnheim or the Rajah can leave the front to tell me. Can you not send one of the slaves? You must not go out yourself.”

Only a few minutes had elapsed, during which his nurse had done her utmost to silence the anxious

inquiries she could not answer, when the Rajpoot Prince, his face and naked arms bearing honourable traces of the part he had taken in the close and desperate struggle, stood by his English friend's bedside. With a courteous salute to the lady, towards whom and her companions he had on the few occasions when they met displayed all the polished courtesy of a European gentleman of the old school, he told in the fewest possible words all that as he well knew the patient was restlessly anxious to learn.

"You were right about the mine," he said. "Terrible as the danger was if the enemy's guns had exploded it, frightened out of their wits as our men would have been if they had known of its existence, it was the only thing that could have saved us when you fell, and it has saved us so far effectually. They were so scared that they ran unpursued for half an hour afterwards, and your friend sallied out, spiked and disabled their guns, and blew up the greater part of their powder. They have not found courage to attempt another assault; though——" He paused, and Darcy feebly answered—

"Though the front can hardly be defensible after the explosion. Surely you have done something to strengthen it?"

"All we could," said the Rajah; "and I think it is good for a while. They have not yet been able to render their guns serviceable, though they have of course recovered possession of their batteries."

At this moment a loud shout from above startled all who heard it. Striving in vain to raise himself

on his left elbow, Darcy listened, with ears rather sharpened by illness than dulled by pain and exhaustion.

“That is not a battle shout; and there is no answer. What does it mean?”

A cry of joy from the women in the inner chambers seemed to answer the question; and the Rajah, hastily stepping to the carefully blocked entrance of the cavern, looked through the embrasure. When he turned again, the brightness of confident hope that had driven from his face the look of fatigue and anxiety it had hitherto worn, told its tale before he spoke.

“The shout meant rescue,” he said. “Your flags are in sight. The force is small, but there is at least one squadron of English cavalry, a small body of white infantry, and a larger force of Natives, who, I think, are Punjabees; and I am almost sure they have guns. Yes, there they go,” as one, two, three, four reports in succession were heard, and he moved again to the embrasure. “They are coming up steadily but quickly across the plain. The artillery are galloping to the front again: they unlimber; they are going to open fire, and the cavalry are wheeling to their left to turn the enemy’s flank. They are your own Lancers, Lieutenant Darcy; not many of them, though, and strangely mixed up. About half of them wear your uniform,” he said, scanning the scene closely with his friend’s glass. “The others are in every sort of dress; but they are white men. Ah! there is a squadron of Native cavalry too, but not in your uniform. The Nawab won’t wait for

them unless they make their charge quickly. There go the guns again."

A feeble hurrah rose from all the pallets and roughly constructed couches of straw and Native cushions, on which the English wounded were propped.

"*Nunc dimittis*," murmured Darcy, as the flush upon his face faded into deadly whiteness. "Zela," and he stretched his left hand weakly to feel for one he could no longer see. But before his pupil, who had just entered the chamber with the draught of sherbet she had with much difficulty contrived to make from the scanty resources at their disposal, had heard her name and reached the couch, he had sunk back lifeless, no breath apparently passing through the half-closed lips, no sight in the eyes that the lids but partially covered.

"Ah! he is dead," cried Zela, with a shriek that drew the Rajah's attention from the exciting scene his eyes were eagerly watching. He came hastily to the bedside, and, kneeling, held for some moments the wrist of his insensible friend.

"No, there is life," he said; "but little enough; and no wonder. Get brandy and mix it with that draught."

He was obeyed, and after a prolonged insensibility the pulse was again distinctly perceptible, a faint colour was slowly struggling back into the white cheeks, when another thundering shout from the front announced the result of what had hardly been a battle and the entrance of the victors into the fortress. But when Colonel Vane stood in front of

his wounded comrade and looked on the still unconscious man, the bitter pain in his face, clouding the expression of intense gratitude and joy it had worn when he first entered, announced his belief that for one purpose at least, and that not the least cherished object of his march, he had come too late. It was with a sad and troubled look that he turned after two or three minutes' silence to the Native Prince.

“Your Highness,” he said, “has made the Government, England, and the Queen your debtors. The defence of this place has been not only one of the most gallant things done in this part of India, but has contributed more than a British brigade could have done to maintain our cause in these provinces. Your Highness may name your own reward, and can hardly name anything that Government will think too high for your deserts. We owe you above all things the lives of at least a score of European men, women, and children, whom I have picked up or of whose safety I have received notice, within a hundred miles of this spot. They had been hidden and kept alive by those into whose power they had fallen, simply because your defence and the patrolling of the country by your men under my friend's command taught them that the British power was still living here, and made them think it safer to earn our good will than to gratify their greed or hatred.”

“Colonel,” replied the Rajah, much affected, “you owe more to your comrade there than to me. But for him, I could have done little, and perhaps I should have done nothing. If he lives, I hope your Government will for once be just, and pay the debt it owes

him. If not, I shall have little pleasure in any recompense they may think due to me."

"Is he living?" said Vane, hastily stooping forward—a question which was answered by a slight movement of the sufferer. "Here, call the surgeon; tell him to come at once."

Some hours later, Darcy had so far recovered as to recognize the face and feebly press the hand of his commanding officer.

"I had little idea," said Vane, "what I was doing when I sent you here. Von Arnheim has told me the story of your rescue and defence of the Residency, your dispersal of the Irregulars from Sivapore, and the work you have done around this place before you were besieged. Any one of these things alone, besides the siege, would have won you a brevet step and the Cross; and of both I hope you are now sure. You must, of course, make me a report as soon as you are able to write; a full one too, and I will take care it goes straight to the Commander-in-Chief."

"You will find," replied Darcy, "in Von Arnheim's and Lady Helen Kavanagh's hands a duplicate account of all we had done up to the last assault, and there is not much to say of that."

"Bah! I have read that; but if all soldiers reported after your fashion, the Government would hardly know what we have done."

"I hope I have done my best. It was a heavy trust, and I am glad you come in time to take it from me. But for Von Arnheim, and above all, but for the Rajah, I could have done nothing. Remember, by the way, the Rajah was in command, not I."

“Nonsense,” said Vane, who as a soldier understood far better than will most readers the significance of such a renunciation. “The Rajah will have, of course, rich and ample reward for his loyalty ; but the command rests with the one British officer on the spot ; and you are entitled to the honour, as you would have borne the blame had you failed.”

“I tell you no, Colonel,” returned the patient earnestly, though with a physical effort that evidently cost him dear. “The Rajah’s flag waved over his Palace till it was knocked to pieces, and ours was only hoisted over the line that we, some two dozen of us at first, undertook to hold. And don’t make a mistake ; the Rajah will value the honours of a soldier ; but he will feel the wrong acutely if Government fail to treat him as a Prince who held his own fortress for the British cause. And what Government will do depends, of course, upon the account you give them.”

“You must talk no more at present. Be satisfied that full justice shall be done to your friend. No soldier can fail to appreciate his gallantry. I think I know to whom his loyalty may be ascribed.”

“The surgeon’s report is a bad one,” said Vane to the German Count, as they sat alone somewhat later in a tent pitched among the ruins. “He says that Darcy’s only chance of life is to reach the sea as soon as possible and return to England ; and that it will be a year at best before he can return to service, if he can ever return.”

“I don’t wonder,” Von Arnheim replied. “His fatigues or his wounds alone might have killed a much stronger man. He will carry to his grave half a

dozen such scars as would do high honour to a soldier of twenty times his length of service, and every one of them severally earned in hard personal conflict. And he is not one of those youngsters who forget the duty of an officer in the courage of a soldier. Through all the weeks that have passed since we parted he has forgotten nothing, left nothing undone, that a General or an experienced civil ruler could have remembered. The plan of the defence, the operations without and within, the collection of supplies, were all his work and his care ; and his example not only made heroes of your own soldiers—any good officer might have done that, with the help of such circumstances—but has won that passionate attachment which Natives give to a first-rate English leader, on the part of every Hindoo warrior here, from the Rajah to his meanest retainer. You can count on your fingers the number of such men that your Company—a strange Government for one of the greatest empires on earth—has in its service ; and it is chiefly on that score or so of men, of whom Darcy will not be the least, that your empire here, won by the sword and held by the sword, as you yourselves boast, depends. Well, you will have to send the women and children you have collected, and those we have sheltered here, to a place of safety. You will let me go with them ; and I will take care of Darcy till I see him on board, at any rate, if I don't, as I should like to do, return to Europe with him.”

When Vane announced to his favourite subaltern the decision of the surgeon, he was not a little surprised by the manner in which it was received.

“ You had made up your mind, I suppose, Darcy,

that you could hardly sit in the saddle again before the best of the fighting here was over? And if you are to be invalided, surely you will be glad to be at home?"

"No, I would rather have stayed in India, if it might be. But, for my father's and sister's sake, I have no right to disobey a warning so imperative; since, as you say, I can be of no use here till your work will be done; and there can be no pleasure in waiting at Simla or elsewhere in the hills to hear what is going on in the plains. I hoped," continued Darcy, "if I had remained here, to bring the Ranee's case, through some influential friend, before the Governor-General. See to it, I pray you, Vane. I cannot. I tried to write something about it during the siege, but I had no leisure, and now I cannot hold a pencil."

"You must not attempt such a thing for weeks to come," said his comrade. "I can guess how much you feel for your pretty pupil, by the passionate interest in and anxiety for you she cannot conceal. Well, you will have her for a companion till you reach your first secure resting-place; and of course I don't know exactly how long you may have to remain there. But Dr. Browne insists that your only chance is to be removed on shipboard as promptly as possible; and I have told Kirkpatrick, who is in charge of the escort, to have you sent on at any cost; to find an opportunity or make one."

"And what has become of our comrades at Sivapore?"

"Major Thomson is safe. He was shot down, but not very seriously wounded; and shammed dead

among those who were killed, or worse hurt, till he had a chance of hiding in the jungle outside the station; where, when I contrived to rally a score or two of my troopers, I found and picked up him and one or two others. Of our own, all but Kirkpatrick are killed. The Brigadier's fate you know; and of the Company's officers half a dozen only have escaped. *We* have lost no women; we had, as you know, but two with us, and we saved with Native help a few of theirs. Thomson and his wife are gone to England, heart-broken for the loss of their little ones, just after their strange escape from the fire. They will thank God and you when they hear of your second rescue of those pretty little maidens."

"I have said nothing, except that they were safe, in my report. Don't add to it, Vane."

"As you please," said the other, not choosing to contradict the wounded soldier. "You must start before daybreak. We have got a *palkee* and relays of bearers for you. Now, don't fret, and don't fatigue yourself with thinking or trying to do anything; and don't break your heart at the parting with your Native Princess."

CHAPTER XI.

APHRODITE THALASSIA.

“A medicine in themselves
To wile the length of languorous hours, and draw
The sting from pain.”

SOME weeks had elapsed before the *Ava*, with many rescued women and children and several wounded officers among her passengers, was on her voyage between Madras and Point de Galle in Ceylon. Darcy lay under the shade of a sail, arranged to shelter him from both sun and wind, by the lee bulwarks of the vessel, somewhat in front of the funnel; and by him, watching him with all a comrade's regard and at least a woman's care and attention, sat the German who had gone with him through all his perils and achievements.

“It is well,” said the latter, “that the rescue was commanded by your own chief, or your report would have spoiled all. As it was, Lord ——, when he read the full account of our adventures in the *Friend of India*, spoke to me about it—I believe he gave me an audience on purpose—and expressed great surprise at the difference between the report received from Vane and the story which, as he guessed or was told,

I had written. I vouched for every detail of my own narrative, and he said, 'Your friend seems to have every military gift but that of writing despatches. Vane avowed that he had filled up his report from other accounts than Darcy's, or I should have hardly appreciated half the merit of one of the best of the many gallant actions it is my duty and pleasure to recommend to Her Majesty for recognition,—my only compensation for the miserable work of the last six months.' It was a pity you could not present yourself at Government House; and it is fortunate that you had for your companion one who is free to tell your story as it deserves, both officially and otherwise."

"You mean kindly," replied the invalid; "but I do hope there will be no more writing about it in the newspapers. Their praise, ignorant as they are, is no honour, and has always seemed to me a sheer impertinence. It is for our Sovereign alone to judge and to acknowledge as she thinks fit a soldier's service; and even you must own that all you could wish has been done for me in official quarters."

"I hope so," answered Von Arnheim. "And I hope your War Office will not allow you to suffer by your own modesty. But, with so many clamorous applicants for favour, they are terribly apt to overlook those who do not worry them. When a dozen noisy mouths have to be stopped, it needs more conscience and public spirit than an official career generally leaves in a Minister, more principle and common sense than generally survives in a Commander-in-Chief after twenty years' training in the formal etiquette of peace time, to remember and do justice

to any one whom it is safe to neglect. Now, Afzul is bringing your lunch, and I think some one else is only waiting my departure to give you company more agreeable than either Afzul's or mine."

The German walked away to light his huge pipe on a portion of the deck where that indulgence was permitted; and when Afzul had placed beside the patient the slight meal, carefully cooked and served to suit and tempt the invalid's appetite, Lady Helen Kavanagh and her daughters, in deep mourning, prolonged their walk on the after-deck so as to pause where Darcy lay. The widow raised her veil to look with compassionate interest on the young face, so pale, so sharpened and contracted by pain, and the helpless, wasted form she had seen so often, under circumstances that had impressed on her memory pictures never to be forgotten, with the proud, erect bearing of a soldier on whom rested the lives of men, the honour of women, great public interests, and the credit of his regiment and his flag. Her own countenance told to Darcy's eye a sadder story of suffering and sorrow, to which the anxieties he had borne and the physical torture he still endured were in nowise to be compared. Within the last few weeks the dark-brown hair had been mingled with grey more deeply than twelve years of ordinary life should have tinged it. The cheeks, white and worn, showed two bright spots, which under emotion, exertion, or excitement became crimson, contrasting painfully the general dead pallor of the face. The sunken eyes, dark lids, and deep black curves beneath the orbits, told of sleepless nights and wearing thoughts. A more experienced man might

have read the approach of death itself in a change so rapid and so continuous. The young officer only understood the signs of mental and physical suffering calmly borne but not the less telling on soul and frame ; and a deep compassion, which for the moment rendered him almost ashamed of the complacency with which he had accepted feminine pity for his own sharp bodily pangs, mingled with the respect evinced in his feeble attempt to rise on his unwounded arm and lift his cap in salute.

“The surgeon gave us a more favourable account of you this morning,” said Lady Helen. “I hoped to have seen you a little less utterly helpless.”

“The surgeon has something to answer for,” replied Darcy, abandoning the endeavour to rise ; for the exertion, slight as it was, had sent a twinge of pain through all his wounds. “He is bent on making my pain as light as possible, and keeps me in consequence half stupefied with opiates.”

“You suffer, then, still very much ?” she asked with kindly anxiety.

“As much as he will let me,” Darcy answered. “But I think the worst part of a long confinement like this is not pain but weariness. Von Arnheim sacrifices his time and exerts all his memory and invention to amuse me ; and he has contrived a very ingenious apparatus to hold my book. But I cannot read for any length of time, whether from the motion of the vessel or simple weakness. The letters always dance before my eyes after a few minutes.”

“It was thoughtless of me to forget that,” Lady Helen replied, compassionately. “If you can bear

reading aloud, I am sure Alice will be too glad to relieve your weariness so long as you can enjoy it."

Darcy answered courteously, but with something of doubt or indifference in his tone, which the mother failed to understand. Looking to the daughter's face for a confirmation of the offer, and unable to read the expression he found there and which did not seem exactly one of ready assent, the natural aversion of a gentleman to accept a kindness burdensome to the giver was strengthened by a half-conscious feeling of pain at the young lady's seeming reluctance.

Lady Helen turned the conversation.

"I knew," she said, "long ago a family of your name. Are you connected with the Darcies of Ulswater?"

"My father," returned the young Lancer, "is Darcy of Ulswater. We have, so far as I know, no connections of our own name either in England or France. Our family has been all but exterminated on more than one occasion; for the last time in the French Revolution."

A very slight flush coloured the widow's pale face.

"I knew him, and," she added, after a moment's pause, "esteemed him much, more than twenty years ago."

Whether she felt pain in the memory of an acquaintance which, if furthered by her family, might have been something more than acquaintance, when she was a romantic girl of eighteen and easily impressed by the tragic story attached to the name of a neighbour who, though much older than herself, had still retained all the grace and vigour of youth and all

the elegance and dignity of manner and bearing inherited from the old school of French *gentilshommes*—or whether she simply feared to tire the invalid, who, as she observed, replied to her remarks in a somewhat feeble and hesitating voice, Lady Helen passed on with her younger daughter. Alice lingered behind.

“Mr. Darcy,” she said, with an effort to overcome the shyness, somewhat foreign to her usual manner, evident in her downcast eyes and slightly deepening colour, “if I can relieve your weariness in any way, believe me I shall be most glad to do so.”

His face brightened. “I did not like,” he replied, “to take advantage of your mother’s offer while uncertain whether it would not be troublesome to you. I never liked to read aloud myself, and never did it well; but I was accustomed some time ago to listen to better readers often and long in the winter evenings, and I know how great an effort it is to those who don’t like it. But when you can and will read to me, without making it a fatigue or a task to yourself, you could do me no greater favour. My last eighteen months have been so busy, so occupied either with active duty or with the necessary study of my profession and of the language, and,” he added, after a moment’s hesitation, “with other work, that I have fallen behind, even more than Anglo-Indians generally do, in the literature of the day, and there are many of the best books published within the last three or four years that I have hardly seen. And more than that, not a few of those which, though not twenty years old, have already taken their places as English

classics, which every educated man and woman except myself seem to have at their fingers' ends, are strange to me."

The girl still hesitated a moment to follow her mother, half afraid, perhaps, to show her natural interest in the invalid, half unwilling to leave him alone while her presence evidently gratified him; but finding no excuse to remain, she was turning away, when he held out his hand to detain her a moment.

"Hark!" he said. "I have heard that song from the forecandle more than once, and it makes a painful impression on me, as so unlike what in other times English sailors would have sung or listened to."

Alice had not heeded the earlier stanzas, and it was a mere fragment that she now caught.

"These news we bore to the Commodore o'er threescore leagues and
three;
And Eric swore, by the Nailprints four, and by Him who died on
tree,
For one chance more to pay his score, nine years he'd sweep the
sea:
On that ship accurst he'd wreak the worst, or bear the worst
might be,
Should he chase her thrice from the Northern ice to the heats of
Barbary!
And whether she bore her flag of yore—would she fight, or strike,
or flee—
At her every spar he'd hang a tar of her crew that bravest be;
From each hand alive strike fingers five, and blast the Captain's e'e,
Nail skull and crossbones at her fore, with a skeleton swinging free;
And leave her a hundred leagues from shore,
With a hurricane blowing Nor'-East-by-Nor',
And no port but Hell a-lee!"

The song was interrupted by a call from the boat-swain, which summoned the singer and his European messmates to assist in the duties of the Lascar seamen who formed the majority of the crew.

“That,” said Darcy, “shows the temper which I am afraid pervades the whole nation at this time, and which is not the least evil of the consequences of this hateful war. That our men should be savagely vindictive is natural, and that indulgence in vengeance should increase the thirst of it is, I am afraid, equally inevitable. But if anything could reconcile me to being helpless and useless at such a time it is the temper of our army, even of our officers, and still more of civilians, and the nature of the war we are waging.”

“Do you call it revengeful?” inquired Alice, her eyes brightening, her face flushing with eager feeling. “I suppose hatred, and a desire to see those who have wronged us punished, can never be Christian. But war itself is unchristian enough, and if human nature might ever plead an excuse for such passions, surely they are just and righteous now? I don’t think I can feel pity or mercy for my father’s murderers.”

“I cannot but think, Miss Kavanagh, that if you had heard what I have heard of the talk even of our officers, you would hardly speak as you do. I have never answered hitherto, when I have heard our women speak on this subject. They disgusted me so that I could not trust myself to reply; and it pains me to hear you say what is but a very feeble reflection of the savage sentiments which even those men who share them hardly care, I think, to hear from feminine lips.”

The girl was not a little hurt as well as surprised by the rebuke.

“I thought,” she answered, somewhat hastily, “that you—whose part in the work of chastisement has been the subject of so much praise in the very conversations of which you complain—would be the last to speak so tenderly of a race of mutineers and murderers, or to compassionate the butchers of women and children.”

An expression of deep pain passed over the young soldier's features.

“Yes,” he said, “I have hanged thieves and scoundrels, I have shot the ringleaders in rebellion freely enough, though I know my men have been on every occasion disposed to murmur at my lenity ; and if I had let them have their own way, they would, I believe, not only have shed much innocent blood, but become utterly demoralized. But when women and girls talk of military vengeance, they talk of what they don't understand ; and it is only by remembering their ignorance that one can forgive their language.”

Alice turned her face away ; and, excited by the subject, and perhaps through illness and the effect of frequent and powerful opiates having lost something of his usual self-control, the speaker went on—

“Do you know, have you any idea, what a war of vengeance, a war in which no quarter can be given, really means ? Can you fancy what it is to see men who have fought to the last throw down their arms and call for quarter, and be obliged to cut and shoot them down like wild beasts ? Can you conceive what a man's feelings are—not perhaps when, with the dead bodies of women and children before him, he orders the execution of a score of men who at any rate are criminals, but when he must command the shooting

of prisoners in cold blood ; prisoners with whom he has just crossed swords, and who have fought as bravely and as conscientiously as himself ? or, again, when he comes to reflect at night, perhaps on a bed of sickness, on what he has done, and to ask himself upon what evidence of guilt he has sent so many fellow-creatures to their last account ? Do you know that in such a war, and in such examples, as they are called—such, for instance, as I myself made at Siva-pore, and still believe I did well to make—we never know how many of the victims are individually guilty ; we cannot but feel, when we reflect on the matter in cold blood, that probably one in five may have been wholly innocent ? I say nothing of the blood shed in battle ; though if you had looked on the slaughter that took place so near you, I think the scene would have been reproduced in your dreams for many a year to come. But there is one act I can never forget, and never bear to remember. When, in our return to Kulwar from Sivapore, we cut our way through a strong rebel force, the leader of that force, the man who gave it courage and cohesion, as gallant a soldier as I ever saw, was one who believed, as earnestly as any Englishman believes in the righteousness of our own cause, that he was serving God and his country in taking arms against us. He fought like a hero. My sword was crossed with his, and he would have cut me down, when my men broke in, rescued me, and made him prisoner. I ordered them to shoot him. The man faced us calmly and bravely, and died as Montrose or Derby died for their faith and King. Every day that this war continues must see such executions.”

“Yes,” retorted the girl, “I heard of that and thought it—well, I will not say what I thought; but I did not expect to be reproved for vindictive feeling by the officer who ordered that—execution.”

“Pardon me,” replied Darcy, sobered at once by the pain and displeasure manifest in her tone even more than in her words, “if anything I have said has sounded like reproof to you. But, Miss Kavanagh, you spoke, and very naturally, of some whom you cannot forgive. That man above all others, as I afterwards learnt, was responsible for the attack on the Residency and for all that happened there. Yet, knowing that, and knowing that I only put in execution the law which punishes rebellion with death, I cannot look back on that day without pain and something like shame; and I don’t complain of *your* reproof. Perhaps, when you remember it, you will see that I interpret your real feelings somewhat more truly than yourself, if I say that a woman’s desire of vengeance means that she does not realize what military vengeance is. It is not the execution of men individually or collectively guilty of actual crime, but of all who are found in arms in the same cause with mutineers and murderers. Now, there has scarcely ever been a civil war in which both sides were not deeply stained with such crimes; yet there has seldom been a civil war followed by executions in which history has not condemned those executions, and fixed the sympathy of all, whatever their ideas as to the rights of the quarrel, on the victims and not on the executioners.”

There was a pause. Darcy felt that he had said enough and perhaps more than enough; and Alice,

though neither by reply nor by a hasty departure did she manifest resentment, showed no disposition to continue the argument. For a moment she turned, and bent on Darcy as he ended a look from eyes half filled with tears, whose meaning, whether of pain or of half submission to the force of the personal argument, he could not interpret.

The next day, however, when paying with her mother and sister their morning visit of inquiry, she had brought with her a couple of books, indicating her readiness to confer the promised favour; a willingness the more acceptable that, as the invalid hoped, it implied forgiveness of any offence that might have been given by the warmth and freedom of his criticism. After listening for some time with no little enjoyment, as much of the ear as of the mind, to the sweet clear tones that gave full and discriminating expression to one of the most striking passages in a then newly published volume of Macaulay, he took advantage of a pause to renew their conversation.

“I had time—I have but too much time for thinking,” he said, “to think over what I said yesterday; and I must ask you to pardon what, after all, was meant less as a reply to you than as the expression of much that I have long and keenly felt and been obliged to suppress. One is pretty sure to speak out at last, if one has kept back long what one feels strongly; and to speak out probably not because any sentence at the moment especially provokes one’s feeling, but to the person whose sympathy one would like to have, and whose contrary opinion or sentiment one feels most painfully. It was easier to me to bear

downright ferocity talked by women of whom I knew little and thought less, than to hear what reminded me of their language from your lips. I know I spoke inconsiderately ; perhaps I spoke rudely, for I cannot remember all I said. But if I pained or offended you, believe that I intended what you called reproof not for yourself, but for those whose ideas I could not endure that you should seem to share."

"I think," Alice replied, "that in the main at least you were right ; and certainly I was not offended. I was glad to hear a soldier, who has proved that there is neither wavering nor weakness in his mood, speak in such terms of enemies so savage. And you were quite right in this ; that I spoke, as no doubt women and girls do generally speak, of vengeance with little idea of what it actually means. I don't suppose any of us really wish that any but the guilty should suffer for crimes, however atrocious, and however cruelly they have wounded us."

Her lip quivered slightly as she spoke the last words, which recalled a scene so horrible and a loss so deeply and lastingly felt ; and, without directly turning the subject, Darcy was glad to give it a different tone.

"I trust," he added, more lightly, "you will forgive me anything that seemed personal in my words when you remember your own implied censure on me. I am sure you would if you knew how keenly I felt that censure, coming from you, and falling on the one act which, if I cannot repent, I can never remember but with pain."

"I am afraid," she returned, kindly, "that you

have too much time to think, as you call it, or as I should say to brood, over the past; or you would hardly have given so much thought to a few foolish words of mine."

"I am afraid, Miss Kavanagh, I should always find time to reflect on anything you had said, especially in the way of censure upon myself. But it is true that I cannot help what you call brooding now. While in active life and in health, I had trained myself to command my own thoughts; not to think either of a past that could not be repaired, or of a future I could not control."

"That must be difficult," the girl answered, with some interest. "When one expects something dangerous or unpleasant, one goes on thinking of it and fearing it till one suffers probably much more in the anticipation than in the reality; and that one can't help it makes no difference whatever."

"Unless," Darcy returned, "a man makes up his mind and sets himself resolutely to turn away from such thoughts as often as they repeat themselves. It is a difficult art, and takes long and resolute practice. But I fancy, if one means to act vigorously and keep one's strength of mind and nerve for action, one must acquire it. But now, with nothing to do and weak, and, I think, affected by Dr. Browne's opiates—I have been told that opium always weakens the will—my thoughts go not as I will, but cling round the scenes and memories not that impressed me most at the time, but that seem to have left the clearest picture behind. I should like to think of England and what is before me there; but always when I try to picture

my home, my father and sister, the cave-temple, the devastation of Sivapore, and other scenes of my Indian life, reproduce themselves before my eyes instead."

"Your thoughts must naturally turn," she replied, "to a quarter in which so much is still pending, in which you yourself have played a part, and in which you, even more than the rest of us, must be so deeply interested; and I suppose you cannot but long to be sharing with your comrades the hard and glorious task from which you have been withdrawn?"

"I don't know," he answered, doubtfully. "Putting aside what I said yesterday of the nature of our warfare, I am ashamed to say it, but—I am not sure that my experience has not made a coward of me."

"Mr. Darcy!" cried Alice, indignantly, "no one else would dare to say or to fancy such a thing; and if you really fancy it, it is because your nerves are shaken and your mind saddened by pain and restlessness."

"I don't know. One doesn't realize what severe wounds mean till one has tried. I don't feel sure that it will be so pleasant to face a heavy fire again now I know what is meant by the probe—the surgeon's work is worse than the enemy's, and the worst of a bullet is the cutting it out—or that the flash of steel will be quite so exciting and exhilarating, when it will remind me of weeks during which I have had no freedom from torture except what I have owed to opium. At any rate, it is not military ambition that turns my thoughts back so constantly to India."

His companion coloured a little, and turned her head

away. After a short pause, she took up her other book, a volume of Tennyson. Darcy listened with even greater enchantment than before as she read that one of the Laureate's poems which is most enjoyed by readers so young as they, perhaps least liked or approved by his elder admirers.

"You delight in 'Locksley Hall,'" she said, after receiving his warm thanks, and listening to one or two comments displaying no very remarkable critical perception. "Is it partly the heroine's name that gives you a special interest in it?"

"Not exactly," he answered, with a smile. "The name is dearer to me than any other; but it has no such associations for me as the poem suggests."

The slight flush on Alice's cheek might have been called up by maiden consciousness of the pardonable imprudence of her question, or by pleasure in the latter part of his reply; but it suggested nothing to Darcy's youthful inexperience.

"Did you know, then," he asked, "my sister's name? Or what could put into your head the idea that that name had special associations for me?"

"Your sister!" the girl said, with a little start; then paused in some confusion, half aware that to an observant eye and ear she would have betrayed, though hardly conscious of it herself, the purport of her question.

"Yes," replied Darcy, "a sister—except my father, almost the only companion of my life till I joined the Lancers. But if you did not know that, how came you to fancy that the name was interesting to me? In truth, while you read, it hardly struck me; and I

certainly was not conscious of connecting the heroine with my Amy."

It was with no small difficulty that Alice made a confession of which she felt not a little ashamed.

"Simply," she said, "because, when you were first recovering consciousness after your fall, that was the name you spoke, fancying, I suppose, that you were at home, and asking her to take the bandage from your head."

"Ah!" he returned, "Amy has sat by me and bathed my head with eau-de-Cologne through many a fit of headache almost as bad as that was. It is strange that, dearer than all else in the world as she is to me, my thoughts dwell so little on her and my home, and so much on India."

"And," suggested Alice, in a somewhat hesitating tone, "perhaps on some one there almost as dear to you as Amy."

Darcy bit his lip. "No, Miss Kavanagh," he said, in a changed tone, distinctly cold and betraying a slight shade of annoyance, "if Zela be dear to me, it is certainly, though of course in a much less degree, as Amy is dear; as a younger sister for whom I have had much trouble and taken much interest, and for whose future I feel not a little anxious. But to know that Zela is safe and happy is all I care. Knowing that, it would not grieve me for an hour to know, what is certainly most likely, that I shall never see her again."

Perhaps a half-conscious sensation of pleasure in hearing this assurance and the tone in which it was given, an intuitive self-reproach for the unavowed

jealousy that had prompted the suggestion, led Alice, provoked with herself, to turn, with a mixture of feminine injustice and a maiden's instinct of self-defence, upon one who she thought might have read the feelings she would not own to herself.

"Then, Mr. Darcy," she said, looking him full in the face, though after a moment her eyes sank before those whose steady look met her own, "you have hardly used Zela kindly or rightly. Did it never occur to you that you might be teaching your pupil a lesson that, if you cared so little for her, it was ungenerous and cruel to let her learn?"

Such a rebuke, coming from so young a girl, not a little startled Darcy; but, fortunately for the speaker, his conscience, disturbed by the remarks of others rather than by any observation of his own, so far seconded the reproach as to concentrate his thought upon its justice rather than upon the motives that had prompted its utterance.

"No, Miss Kavanagh," he replied quietly, though with an inward uneasiness and a slight flush of which he was conscious but which he could not repress. "Why and how I came to take a special interest, first in Zela's mother and afterwards in the child herself, it would be long to tell—impossible to tell you fully. I should be sorry to think that in undertaking the instruction of one who could find no other teacher to give her the very elements of English and Christian education, I had done so cruel an injury where I intended pure and simple kindness. Putting age and race aside, I should think any other than childish or sisterly affection on Zela's part as impossible as on

my own. A pupil more than half a child, at any rate when our lessons began, is as little likely to find the peace of her after life disturbed by affection for her tutor as an English gentleman to fall in love with her."

The conversation had reached a point at which neither wished to continue it, and her mother's appearance on deck afforded Alice a welcome excuse for retreating from a controversy it was almost as difficult to break off without awkwardness as to continue with propriety. There was indeed for the next day or two some constraint, on her part at least, in the intercourse between them. She could not, however, withdraw, without attracting her mother's notice and inquiries, the attentions on which the invalid had become dependent; and as Darcy made no further reference to the matter, and indeed forbore to speak of India and their common Indian recollections, the discomfort which Alice felt in recalling her own rebuke and his reply gradually wore away. The readings brought her into daily *tête-à-tête* conversation with the young officer; and his services to her and her family—the peculiar experiences which, shared together, had rendered an acquaintance of a few weeks to the feelings of both as intimate as under other circumstances might have been one of years—as well as his real dependence upon her for the relief of the weariness of illness, afforded the young girl an excuse perfectly satisfactory to her own half-conscious doubts, as well as to her mother's judgment, for the continuance of intercourse which became daily more frank and unrestrained.

CHAPTER XII.

GUERDON.

“A grace to me!
I am your warrior; I and mine have fought
Your battle.”

AT Alexandria Von Arnheim took leave of his friend.

“You can do without me now,” he said, “since you can almost sit up, and Afzul can render you all the active services you still require; and you will not miss my company as you might have done if you had not earned a claim to attentions naturally much more agreeable as well as more flattering than those of a middle-aged comrade. But, Darcy, don’t spoil your career, even for something more and better than one of the loveliest and noblest faces I ever saw in so young a girl. You need not exalt Miss Kavanagh’s qualities to me, or excuse your admiration by asserting for her all the merits that the romance of first love can find in its object. I grant you that she has a spirit and a mind worthy of her beauty, and worthy of all the chivalric devotion that you would like to give her, and will give to any woman with whom you may hereafter fall in love. But you will make too good a soldier to be spoilt; and a soldier who marries

before his career and his position are made is, especially in your service, generally spoilt. Your chances of distinction will lie on the wild frontiers of your colonies, in China, in India, everywhere where a wife must be a serious encumbrance, especially to a junior officer, and whither a wife's family will not care to see her taken. I should be very sorry to hear that you were married before you are in command of your regiment; and you know better than I how long an interval separates you from that position."

"There are better reasons than those you give," said Darcy, speaking with tolerable cheerfulness, though with an effort perceptible to his experienced companion. "What a German soldier would consider a competence on which to marry, I don't know; but I know that I have not and need never look to have what I could offer to any lady whose hand I could ask. And though I might, probably should, hold the prize you so depreciate far higher than any that, even if I can resume it, my profession could possibly offer, it is one to which as things actually stand I could not presume to aspire."

"Ach so; I understand! Well, you'll suffer cruelly for a while, and it is useless to tell you that twenty years hence you will think as I do. But a hopeless or disappointed love is a better thing than a hampering marriage. I don't see, though, how it can be, even in England, presumptuous for the heir of two great historic families, French and English, to aspire to a younger grandchild of one whose peerage dates subsequently to the attainder of your own. We at any rate should think an Earl of George II.'s

making honoured by an alliance with the House of Ultramar."

"*There* is another obstacle," replied Darcy, trying to speak lightly, but unable to conceal the suppressed bitterness of his tone. "A Prince may kneel to a lady, and I should feel myself more nearly the equal of most Princesses than of Miss Kavanagh; a man without birth or fortune may now and then win the assent of noble and wealthy parents; but my father's son could not stoop, even for her sake, to affect less than social equality with her grandfather—could not win even *her* hand through the tone and attitude in which alone I could hope successfully to sue for it."

"Spoken like a French Legitimist or a German of sixteen quarterings," returned his friend, smiling. "I did not think so much pride of birth still lingered among your English *noblesse*. But if that pride cost you nothing more than a bitter disappointment, and a void at heart which you will be eager to fill with active service, so much the better. Well, good-bye; write to me at Cairo to report your safe landing in England. They are ready to carry you down to the last boat, and the steamer has weighed anchor already. Have you heard from home since we landed here?"

"No," replied Darcy. "They say that the outward-bound steamer with the English mails has been delayed, and the Captain of the *Europa* will not wait for her. I wish I had heard. I have received no letter from home since those I got at Calcutta, which were sent before they heard of the outbreak at Sivapore, all save one short note from my sister,

written just after the news of that outbreak reached them, and while they were in intense anxiety to know what had become of myself."

"*Au revoir!*" said the Count, earnestly; indeed, with an emphasis on the commonplace which he remembered with a kind of superstitious awe in much later years; as if the involuntary stress laid on the words had been ominous of the circumstances under which the wish was fulfilled.

The absence of the comrade to whom he had been so much indebted left Darcy more dependent than ever on the attentions of Alice Kavanagh; the more so that her mother, declining faster and faster under the shock from whose effects she had never recovered, and suffering apparently more in mind and body as the moment approached when her landing in England must recal the terrible change that had taken place in her life, appeared less and less upon deck. He had another friend, but one whose kindness, eagerly proffered with absolute simplicity and innocence, he did not care to encourage. Minnie Thomson had taken a strong childish liking, not so much perhaps for the officer who had rescued her and her sister from a peril of whose magnitude and character she was unconscious, as for him who during all the terrible days of the siege, during the weariness of their long confinement in the semi-darkness of the caverns, had never forgotten for a single day to visit them; and had on no occasion failed to notice the little ones, among the youngest and most delicate of the sufferers, to whom the very enmity he bore their father gave a stronger claim on his especial

and scrupulous consideration. But, his resentment against the father unsoftened, Darcy shrank from the continuance of an intimacy with the children which could hardly fail to bring him into relations almost friendly with their parents. The wrong and even the insult to himself he would probably have been willing to overlook, his pride more than satisfied by the services imposed though by mere chance upon his enemy ; but the wrong to one so helpless and so innocent as Zela rankled bitterly in his spirit, and had so convinced him of the utter meanness and worthlessness of the offender as to render the idea of friendly intercourse with a thoroughly despicable character hateful and intolerable to him. If he could not be actually unkind to one so sweetly and innocently grateful—and it was not in Darcy's nature to be unkind to a child—if he could not repel or receive with deliberate coldness the affectionate inquiries and caresses of the little girl, he had managed so far to avoid or withdraw from them that in the confusion of landing he trusted to escape any farewell that would attract the parents' attention ; and in the strangeness and excitement of their return the children would speedily forget their friend of the cave temple and the voyage—forget even that question which Minnie had repeated more than once or twice, whether he were not the officer who had carried them out of the flames.

The Mediterranean voyage, through a mild and genial climate, did much to favour Darcy's convalescence, a convalescence which he was perhaps in no hurry to avow even to himself, or to manifest by premature exertion. The privileges of illness were too

precious to be readily relinquished ; and the surgeon, aware that months must elapse before the effect on the sufferer's constitution of wounds so severe and fatigues so prolonged could be repaired, was by no means anxious to stimulate his patient to unwilling efforts. Still the invalid was able to sit up, supported by pillows, before the vessel passed the Straits of Gibraltar ; and suffered less than might have been expected from the colder weather of the Atlantic, growing rougher and chiller every day with the northward progress of the ship.

“ Miss Kavanagh,” said the doctor one morning to Alice, who, well wrapped against the rough breeze and the spray that every now and then broke upon the vessel, took her usual walk on deck, “ I am half sorry to see you turning out, though the air will do *you* nothing but good. My patient has no business on deck to-day, and if you would condescend to shrink from the weather I think I might get him back to the saloon he ought not to have left.”

The young lady was more annoyed than gratified by the implied recognition of her influence, perhaps mortified a little by the brightening colour of which she was not unconscious.

“ It would be hard on Mr. Darcy to leave him to himself, because he likes the fresh air as well as I ; and if you cannot enforce your own orders, Doctor, you must not expect me to assist you.”

Darcy reclined this time under the lee of the funnel, as well sheltered as ever by the care of his servant and of the sailors, who had treated the invalid almost from the first with characteristic kindness and con-

sideration; the more eagerly volunteered as their acquaintance lengthened, and they were touched and gratified by the frank courtesy with which, however ill or suffering, the invalid never failed to acknowledge and remember each little service rendered to him, and recognize the renderer in future. As Alice approached unseen the carefully arranged couch facing the bow, she saw that Minnie was standing by its side.

“Mr. Darcy,” said the child, “have I been naughty, or vexed you? You were so kind to me and Fanny in those caves, when you were so busy that you could scarcely spare half an hour in the day; and now, when you have nothing to do, I always seem to tease you.”

It would have been a hard, unfeeling temper that could resist the frank and simple appeal.

“I am ashamed, Minnie, if I have been cross to you. No, you are very good, you never tease me; and even Fanny, though she is not so careful as you are, has never hurt me since the first time she stumbled over my right arm. Thank you,” as the child lifted to his lips the glass which his wounded arm was still unable to hold steadily, and with the other hand he caressed the long bright locks flying loose in the breeze. “You will know some day how irritable invalids are apt to be, and will not think they mean to be unkind because they are silent or speak sharply.”

“Then you are friends with me?” Minnie asked, looking into his face with a glance half doubtful, half glad, and full of simple gratitude and affection.

“Always, Minnie. But you will not care to listen

to Miss Kavanagh's reading, and you must not disturb her."

"Let me stay by you. I will be quiet," the child entreated, as Darcy held out for the first time his right hand to the visitor who had now come within his sight. But at this moment the bell that summoned the children to their separate meals was struck, and called the little one away.

"I hope," said Alice, "you have set Minnie's little heart at rest? I have not ventured to remonstrate with you, knowing that children must be troublesome in sickness; but I have been sorry more than once when I have seen the tears in her eyes as she left you; and it did not seem like you to hurt even a child's feelings."

"Less a child's," answered Darcy, "than any one's—and I had no idea that I had really given Minnie pain."

"I thought you liked her till we came on board. During the siege, she seemed your favourite among all the children, and she is a sweet little creature."

"Yes, and it has always gone against me not to make much of her. But, Miss Kavanagh, her father and I are something more than unfriends, and I don't want the child's affection to interfere with our quarrels."

"I could not have thought," the girl answered, in a tone of indignant reproach, "that you could bear malice against a child for her father's faults, whatever they may be."

"You are very hard upon me, Miss Kavanagh," Darcy answered, more of pain perceptible in the tone

than in the words. "If Major Thomson thinks he has reason to hate me or resent what I have done, can I wish that he should be compelled to suppress his ill-will, because his child might tell him of things for which he would feel himself under an unwelcome obligation to a personal enemy?"

"I understand; and I ought to have understood without being told," Alice replied, faintly.

She had been reading aloud for some half-hour, when at a convenient pause she laid down her book.

"I think I am wearying you, Mr. Darcy, to-day. You have hardly taken in what I have read for the last ten minutes. Nay, don't try to excuse yourself! I saw the paroxysm of pain that diverted your attention."

"It is true, Miss Kavanagh, but I did not the less enjoy your reading; as one enjoys music even if one is not absorbed in listening to it."

"A very courteous excuse, and very prettily said," laughed the girl; "but it would flatter my vanity more mischievously if the compliment were a little more original."

"I should not presume, Miss Kavanagh, to offer you the commonplaces of compliment. I spoke the literal truth; and if such a compliment would be trite, the reality which I ventured to acknowledge is anything but a common one. Very few feminine voices even in early youth are really musical, though it be the fashion to call them so. Women's tones are habitually sharp and shrill as the fiddle, as men's are no less often rougher than the bagpipes. But I have heard my father say that our two greatest

orators are worth hearing even if you are angered by every word they speak; the one voice having all the power and compass of the organ, the other the peal of a trumpet. So there are ladies whose voices in reading or talking are so sweet and soft that it would be a pleasure to hear them even in an unknown tongue; voices that soothe pain or irritation into a calm as delicious as that produced by physical opiates. Miss Kavanagh, if I forgot the author's sense, I was not for a moment insensible to the reader's tones."

The comparison was too quaint and frank, the explanation too simply earnest, to seem mere compliment or apology. The gratification with which Alice heard it was not wholly due to her natural pleasure in the well-deserved praise bestowed on a voice of really rare beauty. The reverent earnestness that seemed almost to entreat her belief in her own praises, implying a respect that dared not flatter, gave at least half its value to a tribute she enjoyed much more than she would have cared to own.

"You were evidently in pain," she said softly, modestly ignoring the personal homage, "but you have always wished me to go on and take no notice when I can do nothing for you."

"These returns of pain are sharp enough," he answered, "but fewer and shorter every day. This one recalled to me what I suffered when I was weak enough to complain to you. You have made me daily more and more ashamed of that complaint."

"I, Mr. Darcy!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Surely I have said nothing so false to my own

thought, so ungenerous to one who endured so much and so bravely in our cause?"

Her wondering self-reproach gave to her look and words a warmth, an eagerness of sympathy whereof she was wholly unconscious.

"No, indeed," returned Darcy; "but you have made me feel how little cause I had to complain. The pain was atrocious. I had, and I fancy even soldiers who have never been wounded have, very little idea what it is. But if I had known how it was to be compensated, I should have been poor-spirited indeed to have grudged it."

"Ah, yes!" said Alice, instinctively evading the meaning she instinctively apprehended. "You will prize the honour you have earned, the soldierly rewards they all say are awaiting you, as keenly as a soldier should; and, more than even your Sovereign's recognition of your service, and the praise of your chiefs, you will feel your father's, your sister's, pride in such a son and brother. I have often wished to repeat to you, if I could have ventured, what people say of the defence of Kulwar by so young an officer. I am so glad to listen to it; but——"

A sudden access of self-consciousness checked the impulsive self-betrayal. Darcy had listened very coldly till then; but the words that revealed her personal interest in his fame called to eyes that showed no pleasure in fame itself a momentary gleam of passionate delight, which he could not conceal and she could not face.

"You must be glad," Alice continued, after a pause, "to be so near home. Are you not counting

the days to the end of this long voyage, so full of pain and weariness for you, as I used to count the days at school when the holidays were near?"

"No, indeed! Since I called it wearisome you have never allowed me to feel it so. Miss Kavanagh, no words I could find could tell you how grateful I am for your kindness; how pleasant you have made the confinement and helplessness I thought so irksome. Believe me that I speak the simple literal truth, if I tell you what thought was in my mind when it wandered from your reading. I remembered bitterly how soon I should listen to it for the last time; and, when you laid down your book, I was wishing that our voyage might begin again, with thrice the pain I thought so intolerable till I learnt how cheap a price it was for the privilege of your presence and your sympathy."

"You forget," she answered, with much emotion in her tone, and feeling even more than found expression in voice and manner, "you forget how your wounds were received. We should be little worthy of all men do and suffer for us, if we could grudge anything we can do to soothe or relieve the torture and to wile the tedium of wounds or sickness incurred on our behalf. How could I—could any of us—but be eager to do all the very little we are allowed to lighten the suffering, to cheer the loneliness, of one who so nearly and so willingly gave his life for ours?"

"Miss Kavanagh," rejoined Darcy after a few moments, earnestly but with evident and constantly increasing hesitation, "you have dwelt more than once on the consequences of that chance which

placed me, instead of another, at the head of the party sent to your aid at the Residency. It happened that the opportunity of serving you was given to me. If I had acted by choice and not under orders, if I had done more than merely fulfil the duty on which I was sent, your kindness has rewarded me far beyond what any soldier's service can deserve. But if you please to think that that chance has given me any sort of claim to your consideration, to special recognition of the simple fact that it happened to be my duty to defend you and yours . . . forgive me if I presume on that good fortune. The privileges of chivalry are as obsolete as its virtues, or I might dare to remind you that a lady's defender was allowed to ask a favour from her, and that she was entitled to reward his service."

His eager earnestness, and the deferential reserve and delicacy that held it in check, gave to his pleading, at least for Alice's ears, the force of true sentiment; or her own poetic spirit sympathized with the genuine romance of feeling that inspired a romance of language congenial to the extreme youth of both. She strove in vain to smile and not to blush, as she replied, in a tone that failed to harmonize with the apparent levity of her first sentence—

"It would be hard to refuse to one who has shown the daring and the modesty of chivalry the privilege he thinks it worth while to claim. But seriously, Mr. Darcy, if there be anything you wish that is in my power, if I—if we can do anything for one who has done so much for us—you know, you cannot but know, there is nothing you could ask that it would not grieve me—grieve us—to refuse."

She had abandoned the effort to jest with the appealing eagerness more evident in his countenance than even in his speech ; and her concluding words were faltered in tones as low and hesitating as his own. As even women are prone to do, ere the habit of self-control has been taught by time and discipline, she sought instinctively, under the increasing embarrassment of half-awakened self-consciousness, some relief in the restless, purposeless movement of her small, slender, exquisitely beautiful hands—movement that would have spoken very expressively to an eye more experienced than Darcy's. In leaving her cabin she had carelessly wrapped round her insufficiently protected neck a slight scarf, which, thus hastily caught up, chanced to contrast signally, in its mixture of black and scarlet hues, her deep mourning dress. The colour caught Darcy's eye ; and as she unconsciously disengaged the kerchief from her throat, he gently laid hold upon it, timidly touching at the same time the fingers that played nervously with its threads as her hands dropped into her lap.

“ I dare not ask what I should most dearly prize,” he murmured, unaware of the passionate tenderness in his tone and look, as half unconscious of the feeling, deeper than that of mere chivalrous devotion and personal admiration, that inspired them ; “ but give me this—it will ever be precious to me because I have seen you wear it—not as reward for a duty already overpaid, but as a memorial of weeks you have rendered the happiest in my life.”

Alice rather permitted him to take than, by look or gesture of assent, gave him the gage he asked. Too

young to understand his feelings or her own, unconscious even of those instincts of maiden reserve in obedience to which she shrank from the novel warmth and vehemence of both, she instantly reproached herself with unkind, ungrateful coldness; thinking herself guilty of an ungracious half-granting of that which had been asked with gracious courtesy and considerate respect. Yielding to the impulse of a nature essentially generous and affectionate, and as yet innocent of any conscious feeling stronger and more disturbing than esteem, sympathy, and gratitude, she bent with deepening colour and drooping eyes over the invalid, and her voice sank to a whisper—

“What is it you ‘wish for but dare not ask’? Mr. Darcy, you would not wish to ask what I should be sorry hereafter to have given.”

Not unnatural surely to the noblest, most absolute purity of maidenhood, the simple faith that spoke in Alice Kavanagh’s words and look of appeal; and probably half the inexplicable shipwrecks of maiden honour may be traced in the first instance to such faith misplaced. She started slightly as the boy-soldier, with reverent lightness of touch, held for one moment between his fingers the loose tress of rich brown hair, tinged here and there with gold, that, as she leaned over him, escaped from its confinement and almost brushed his cheek. But instantly, in the impulse of frank kindliness, she severed the curl he claimed; and as he caught it in one hand, the other clasped that which rested on his pillow with a closer, stronger, longer pressure than it had ever yet ventured. An instinct as unaccountable to himself as her incon-

sistent impulses were to the young maiden restrained the movement, prompted by chivalrous associations and native courtesy, that would have raised the slender, gloved fingers to his lips. Accepting the clasp as their usual farewell, and answering it with one even briefer and slighter than usual, the girl rose quickly; seizing an apparent opportunity to reach her cabin without exposing her tell-tale colour and the tears that trembled in her eyes to the notice of any lounging fellow-passenger: eager to conceal and calm in solitude the mingled emotions of feminine pride, gratified affection, or maiden shame that she herself could not discriminate or interpret—that most surely no masculine pen should attempt to analyze.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLAUDITE !

“Who o’er the crowd would wish to reign,
Fantastic, fickle, fierce, and vain.”

THERE was no little excitement in Southampton when the *Europa* was signalled. It was known that she had on board more than one invalided soldier who had rendered distinguished service in the first and most terrible days of the Mutiny ; many women who had suffered terrors and perils that for their sake brave men shuddered to remember. It was rumoured, moreover, that some had endured still graver wrongs and physical injuries, the very report of which had maddened the temper of the entire nation. Not one woman, so far as authentic history records, returned to screen from the eyes of her countrymen the mutilations imputed to a savagery that needed no exaggeration. But the passions of the people had been wrought up to a pitch of extraordinary excitement by such reports ; and the vessel’s arrival was awaited with feelings as intense as if she brought the tidings of a critical battle and the dead body of the hero who had won it ; as eagerly as the *Victory* when she brought the news of Trafalgar and the coffin of Nelson.

Warned of the confusion and excitement that would prevail when the first boat from the land should board her, and continue till the last passenger had landed, those who shrank from observation, like Lady Helen and her daughters, or, like Darcy, knew themselves unable to make their way through eager crowds, had already made their last arrangements and taken leave of their companions. The young Lancer had sought refuge in his cabin from the confusion sure to prevail on deck, when, as the cheers from the first approaching boat reached his ears, a gentle tap at the door entreated admission for Minnie and her little sister.

“They would scarcely let us come to say good-bye,” the child said. “But I would not go without seeing you. Do tell me now—was it not you that pulled us out of the fire? I asked Afzul there, but he pretended not to understand. I know he did, though; for when the Captain spoke to him in English the next minute, he understood and answered, though he spoke very badly.”

“How should Afzul know?” replied Darcy, evading the question with a smile and a kiss. “Good-bye, little one; your mother is sure to be looking for you with the first boat that boards us, and you must not loiter here, lest you might be lost in the confusion.”

Minnie lingered, unwilling to depart and anxious to repeat her question; but her more eager and excitable sister here interrupted her.

“There, Minnie; I am sure that was mamma’s voice! Now come, be quick!”

The elder child hesitated, started, and then, turning back for a moment, threw her arms round her friend’s

neck, and pressed an eager but silent kiss upon his lips before she allowed herself to be hurried away. The vessel was nearly empty when Darcy permitted his servant and one of the seamen to assist him to the deck. Placed for a few minutes in a chair till arrangements could be made for lowering him into the boat that hung alongside, tossed up and down by the somewhat rough water, his eye fell on three well-known figures in deep mourning, who were already about to descend the ladder at the foot of which another and larger boat awaited them. At the last moment Alice Kavanagh turned and looked around, and as she caught sight of him waved her white handkerchief in farewell; then gave her hand to the gentleman who had already handed her sister and her mother to the boat. Darcy had risen as well as he could to return her salute, and his eyes were fixed on her vanishing form so intently that it was not till she had disappeared that he looked round, and saw what gave him a sudden and terrible shock of surprise and alarm. A young girl, attended by an elderly female servant, both dressed in deep mourning, had raised her veil of crape as she looked anxiously around for some one among the few remaining passengers. Her likeness to Darcy, as striking as often exists between twins, her stature, but a few inches less than his own, her features, and even their expression, reproducing in exact detail those with which Afzul had been long familiar, assured the latter, who now approached his master, that it was Darcy's sister who was seeking but had not recognized her invalid brother. Darcy himself was too utterly surprised by a presence he had

never expected, too much appalled by the tidings implied in the sable dresses, to make any attempt by voice or sign to attract her notice. The girl was very near him before she recognized, with a start of alarm, the worn face, the wasted and helpless form of one whom she had last seen in the full vigour of youth and health. Already shaken by the loss for which she wore her deep mourning, and the effect of which on nerves and spirit was revealed in the dimness of her beautiful eyes, the darkness of the drooping lids, and the tremulous lip, the shock given by the unexpected sight of her brother's figure altogether overpowered her. The embrace was on both sides long and speechless ; and the sister's almost hysterical sobs and passionate weeping made it impossible for her to give any other reply to Lionel's first eager but scarcely articulate question.

“Yes,” she faltered at last, “he lived to hear that you were living, to hear what was said about you ; and then, though he prayed earnestly to see you again, he seemed content. He could not have borne, he said, to die not knowing what had become of you. But he had cause to thank God for the last tidings that reached his ears. Don't ask more now ; I will tell you all when we get to our lodgings.”

Neither spoke again till in the boat, seated by her brother and holding his hand, Amy turned to subjects of which she could speak with self-control in the presence of strangers.

“Crosthwaite has been most useful and most efficient,” she said, “but I was a little frightened and might have found some trouble ; had not a gentleman

who was himself waiting to meet ladies on board travelled with us from London, and helped me in finding apartments here and making my way to the ship. What is that, Lionel?" As the boat pushed off, three ringing cheers were given by a number of seamen who had gathered along the nearer bulwarks. It did not at first occur to Darcy that this farewell salute was intended for himself; till, as the last hurrah died out, a midshipman on board—who had shown all a boy's admiration for Darcy's reported exploits—cried, "One more cheer for Kulwar," and another shout rang along the vessel's side. There was more annoyance than complacency in Darcy's look as he lifted his cap in acknowledgment of the cheers. A faint smile of pride and fondness brightened his sister's pale and mournful face.

"You are not well enough to enjoy the noise that attends on fame," she said, misinterpreting the expression of his countenance. "I hope we may reach our lodgings unnoticed, especially as you are not in uniform. But all the papers were full of Kulwar for some days, and it is not likely to be forgotten yet, if they recognize you."

Afzul, who knew his master's humour if he could not understand it, did his best to bring the little party quietly and unnoticed to their conveyance; but the cheers from the ship had pointed out to the notice of the crowd on shore, as well as to the boatmen, one who might otherwise have passed unobserved, save as a wounded soldier, too young to have been the hero of any important exploit, in the suite of much older and more distinguished men; and their landing was greeted

with more noise and infinitely less consideration than had attended their departure from the ship. Compelled to acknowledge the ovation of which he was the object, but availing himself to the utmost of the rights which even an English mob concedes to helplessness, Darcy, supported by Afzul and his sister, managed to enter the conveyance that awaited them without being actually forced to stop and speak or shake hands with his unwashed admirers.

Amy's thoughtful care had provided, in the quiet lodgings selected by an experience and judgment elder than her own, the refreshment which she was well aware her brother would need before he could listen calmly to what she had to tell. Not till, with all sisterly care and tenderness, she had made him do such justice as an invalid might to the meal, would she allow him to question or attempt to answer. Into her account of their father's last days it is needless to enter. Some part, however, of the last messages left with her had a bearing upon matters without mention of which this story would be incomplete.

"You know," she said, "that he hardly expected when you went out to see you again. Ours has never been a long-lived race, and he, as you know, feared above all things to outlive the use and enjoyment of life; and he did enjoy it almost to the last. Not ten days before, I was walking with him on the mountains above the lake, and his step was as firm, his arm, as he helped me over walls and stones, as strong and steady as it could have been thirty years ago. His illness was so sudden and short, and the end took us so nearly by surprise, that if he had not known better

than we he would hardly have had time to give me even the few messages he did leave for you. . . . Surely it was only natural he should speak of you with intense pride and gratitude to Heaven. It might not be needful, but it was natural too that he should commend me so particularly to your care, now that I have no other friend or relation in the world.—No, Lionel; if you have not forgotten what we were to each other, I need, I wish for, no other affection than yours!—But he bade me explain as far as I could understand it what he knew and thought of your mystery. He would have made a great effort, or would have made almost any sacrifice, he said, that would not have been unjust to me, to secure your commission and to prevent your feeling the pain and mortification of poverty in the service, and especially in a cavalry regiment—as if I could have grudged anything, that you might follow the only career in which you would have been happy, or which would have been satisfactory to him. He would not tell you while he lived from whom he believed the offer came to pay for your commission, and to give you an income sufficient to put you on an equality with your comrades; and he said he was sorry he could not write, for there were things in the story he could not tell to me. You remember we used to whisper to one another, wondering that he so seldom mentioned our mother, though the tablet in our little chapel spoke so touchingly of her? I never knew even who she was, or anything of her family but her maiden name.”

“Nor I,” replied her brother. “Well, Amy?”

“She had, he said, relations of whom he knew

almost as little as we ; but she had one cousin with whom before his marriage he was well acquainted, Sir Francis Clavering. It was under his roof that she was brought up. But shortly before her marriage some quarrel took place that Papa would not explain to me. But he bade you remember that she was very young, and might be utterly in the wrong without being gravely to blame. At any rate she left the house, and Sir Francis would never see or write to her again. But he encouraged our father to visit where she was, and to ask her in marriage. Sir Francis would have done much for them ; but as the quarrel was never made up, our father would accept nothing. But he believes that it was Sir Francis who paid for your commission and made you your allowance ; and he made it his last charge to you neither to inquire nor to refuse ; but if Sir Francis ever sought us out, to accept his acquaintance and his kindness with the respect we should show to a grandfather. ‘And,’ he said, ‘I don’t advise Lionel to quarrel with any one ; but I should be sorry that he should be the debtor or the friend of one great man with whom as a neighbour he may some day become acquainted, and who might be inclined to befriend such a *protégé*—Lord Penrith.’”

“Strange,” observed Darcy, musing ; “I did not know that he was even acquainted with the Earl.”

“I don’t think he was. He never spoke of him before. But remember, Lionel, though he never was intimate with them, though he never visited at their houses and they seldom called on us—we can understand why—our father was on friendly terms with,

was known and respected by all the gentlemen within twenty miles of the Grange, except the family at Penrith Castle."

"A strange fate," murmured Darcy, "that the only family my father would not wish me intimate with is the only one whose goodwill I might come to care for. But, Amy, was there not some connection between Lord Penrith and Sir Francis? I have heard of him from others, though never from my father; and I never guessed that he was our mother's relation."

"Yes," the girl answered. "Lord Penrith's second wife was Sir Francis's sister, but much older than our mother and married long before her."

At this moment a noise in the street, which had been for some time increasing in loudness and confusion of voices, became so tumultuous as to disturb the conversation.

"Upon my word," observed Lionel, "our English towns seem noisier and more disorderly than the Native parts of Calcutta, or than Benares in time of Pilgrimage. I wonder whom they are cheering or pelting now?"

"That is our own name they are shouting," Amy said, with a smile of pride, after listening for a minute.

"Nonsense, child!" her brother replied, somewhat impatiently. But he was enlightened by the entrance of the landlady in some excitement.

"Mr. Darcy, the people are shouting for you, and they are getting angry that you take no notice. Do speak to them a few words, and then they will go. It

is getting a nuisance ; and after all," as she observed his reluctance, "it is something for you to be proud of, sir."

Such was not the young soldier's feeling, if his face truly reflected his mind. But the impatience of the crowd was manifested in a clamour so distinct, and so obviously calling upon him, that it was impossible to ignore and would have been bad taste to refuse the compliment, however worthless. Releasing his right arm from the sling in which he still commonly wore it, and endeavouring to find in Amy's a substitute for the crutch still necessary to his wounded limb, Lionel opened the window and stepped forth upon the balcony. The black clothes he had hastily put on, and the heavy unrelieved black crape of his sister's dress, reminded the crowd of the rumour circulated among them that the object of their favour had returned home only to find himself an orphan ; and the recollection hushed their tumult for a moment into respectful silence.

"Men," said Darcy, instinctively addressing the multitude in the language of the march and the parade ground, "I assure you you are cheering the wrong man. You could not pay too much honour to the Rajah who threw in his lot with us in our hour of extremity ; and of his own free will chose rather to die defending our women and children than to be adored by his countrymen for letting them cut our throats. But we who were sent there, what could we do but stand by him ? Don't suppose they gave us any choice in the matter. Cowards would have fought hard when to be beaten meant to be butchered in cold

blood. I thank you for your welcome to an English soldier ; but there are a good many of us ! ”

“ Not many like you,” cried a voice below ; a sentiment vehemently endorsed by the crowd.

“ Nonsense ! All my comrades envied my good luck in being there, and with good reason. That really made all the difference. If I did my best, so would they ; so all of us do when women and little ones depend on us. English soldiers, aye, and English civilians, in India seldom fail to turn opportunities to account. Opportunities are all they want, and this rebellion affords plenty. I am much obliged to you ; but if you shout so loud for every man who has done his duty you will have abundant exercise for your voices ; and those who chance to come home late will find you terribly hoarse. Thank you once more ; but,” as the noise recommenced, “ the surgeons had better indent early for ipec, or the stores will be empty ; and you won’t have voice left to do even justice to others when their turn comes. So, gentlemen, good night.”

The effect of such words must depend on the tone of the speaker, and Darcy’s was not at first conciliatory. Fortunately for the success of his speech, he had soon caught sight, on the balcony of the great hotel facing him, of two female figures—the younger of those ladies in whose defence he had won the popularity he was now called to acknowledge ; and, unconsciously, his manner softened into a less contemptuous affectation of courtesy as he became aware that Alice Kavanagh was a witness of the honour paid to him. That thought alone gave to the homage of the crowd

a value which in itself it could never have possessed for him ; and what had been almost scorn became, in the latter sentences, good-humoured mockery of applause which a soldier's modesty shrank from treating seriously. The speech, therefore, was accepted in good part, and the crowd dispersed, unaware that their cheers had been received with ridicule rather than with gratitude.

"Lionel," said his sister, "I should have thought a soldier cared more for fame, or even for the shouts that testify to it."

"Fame !" returned her brother, scornfully. "The fame that lies in the shouts of a mob, or the praises of newspapers that know little of the facts and nothing of the merits of military service, can hardly be worth having. At all events, I cannot understand the soldier worthy the name who can find pleasure in them. To be cheered by the rabble of all the towns in England would not be worth Vane's 'Well done !' on the field. No, the only honour an English soldier can prize must come from his chiefs or his Sovereign. For a word, a look, from the Queen, that should say 'You have served me well,' I should be glad and proud to die."

The flush on his cheek, the glistening fire and gathering moisture of emotion in his eyes, satisfied Amy that, however insensible to the popularity that gratified her on his account, her brother had all a soldier's pride in that which seemed to him the fitting reward of a soldier's loyalty.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN PEACE.

“Betwixt them blossomed up,
From out a common vein of memory,
Sweet household talk and phrases of the hearth
And far allusion, till the gracious dews
Began to glisten.”

“I AM sorry, Amy,” said her brother, as he reclined some three weeks later in the projecting window of the sitting-room overlooking from a considerable height the blue water of one of the wildest of our English lakes, his face perhaps intentionally averted from her whom he addressed; “but after examining papers and accounts I find, as I told you I feared, that we cannot stay here. You know that part of my father’s income died with him; and the estate is mortgaged for two or perhaps three years’ value. Living here, we should have no chance to pay it off, probably should get deeper into debt. Letting the place, and devoting the rents to pay off the debt, it will be free in three years at most. Evans has promised me such work in London as I can do till I am able to rejoin, which will not be, the surgeons tell me, for many months yet. Before that time perhaps we may see more clearly what arrangement can be

made for you ; but, Amy, if I do not find some safe and happy home for you, you must see I have no choice. I could not drag you about with the regiment, and I will not leave you alone."

Amy sat, her work in hand, by the large table of dark old oak, corresponding with the panellings of the room and the general aspect of a residence older even than the English traditions of the family ; of whose estates this modest dwelling, with a square mile or two of mountain pasture around it, alone remained to them. The day was dark and gloomy ; the mountains around, close and lofty, soon hid the sinking sun of a Cumbrian winter, and at a distance from the large but low window, if the girl could see her needle, the expression of her countenance was hardly distinguishable. But at the last words she rose, and approaching the window knelt beside her brother and put her arms around his neck.

"Do not say so, Lion. It will be very hard to part with you, but it would break my heart that you should give up your profession, your career, and all that lies before you, after such a beginning, to stay at home with me. I could not have a kinder, a better guardian and teacher, you know," she went on, striving to speak lightly ; "but it would be poor work for you to loiter at home taking care of a schoolgirl, with no better employment than to correct her exercises, and no better amusement than listening to her music."

"My darling, I shall find work more profitable if not so pleasant ; and whatever I might wish—and I could not wish to part with you—one has no more

right to shirk the duty on which one is clearly ordered by Providence than that on which one is sent by a superior officer. It would be as unsoldierly to flinch from a sacrifice so clearly called for, as to grumble at being confined in garrison, or try to evade a dangerous and inglorious piece of service."

"Don't, Lionel; I cannot bear it. No man's life should be sacrificed to a girl's, and yours least of all. Don't talk of such a thing; don't make me feel that it is a pity you have a sister. Can't you understand how hard it must be to feel oneself simply in the way; to know not only that one is useless—that women must often be—but that it would be far better that one did not exist?"

"Amy, how do you think *I* can bear to hear you? Could any fortune or fame I could dream of make up to me for losing the one thing left me to love, for being so utterly alone in the world as I should be without you? Enough, darling. If you can make up your mind to leave our home for so long a time, without crying or fretting . . ."

"Fretting? Lionel! As if I did not know that the sacrifice is far harder to you than to me; that you not only love our home as well, but feel, in letting it to strangers, a mortification I can understand, though I hardly can share it except for your sake."

"I don't like the thought of shutting you up in a London lodging," Lionel answered. "But we shall find other amusement than your music, grateful as that is; and *you* will have to work, Amy: you must profit by the opportunity of better teaching than mine."

Afzul entered the room at this moment, and with a salute of Oriental reverence, strange in the place as the place to him, presented on an ancient salver a large letter with an official seal. Darcy opened it, and having cast his eyes over it handed it to his sister, who had read in his sparkling eyes and brightening colour the nature of its contents.

“The Victoria Cross!” she cried. “Ah! but I knew they could not but give it you. Oh, Lion, if Papa had lived to see this!”

Few human smiles express as sweet and pure a joy as moved the young girl to tears; tears that fell fast over her brother's face and bosom, as Amy's embrace spoke more of gratified pride and fondness than could be uttered in words. The silence of the next few minutes marked perhaps the happiest point in either life. Keen as must be a man's enjoyment of high honours worthily won, far keener, deeper, more delightful because pure of all egotistic feeling, is a loving sister's or mother's enjoyment of such honours bestowed on a son or a brother; and Amy's was the more intense that Lionel was now the sole, as he had ever been the chief, object of her strong and clinging affection. Nor, even in the first love of which he as yet was but half conscious, had he ever realized a feeling more profound and earnest than his attachment to his only and orphan sister. The reward now announced was to him, as to all English soldiers, perhaps the greatest that can requite courage and conduct, and gratify professional and personal pride; and to him, to whom it seemed a derogation from loyalty to accept any honour not coming from the sole

Fount of Honour, this recognition of good service, so early won, was even exceptionally welcome. But, for the moment at least, the strongest element in the mixed emotions with which he received it was wholly unselfish. The best and sweetest part of his satisfaction was derived from his sister's intense delight and gratitude.

"But," said Amy at last, "is there not something more in the last sentence? They cannot expect you to join yet? No, it will be long before you can possibly return to your regiment. What can they mean?"

"I don't know, dear. It may be that a vacancy has been made, or is to be made, that they think I might purchase. But though the solicitor wrote that his employer would furnish the means of purchasing my troop, I will not ask for it. But for our father's command, I would not have continued to accept the favour he ascribed, I suppose rightly, to Sir Francis; and certainly I will not say a word that should even seem to remind him of his further promises."

"Lion, is that acting in the spirit of our father's instruction? Is it quite loyal to his last desire?"

"Remember, Amy, he never bade me do anything to attract, or force myself on, Sir Francis's notice; only to accept it respectfully and gratefully if bestowed of his own accord."

"Yes," said the girl, timidly; "but is it accepting, when he has offered you a troop whenever the opportunity should occur, if you evade availing yourself of the offer by not telling him what of course he cannot be expected to know?"

Her brother hesitated to reply. Amy's simple, straightforward moral instinct had touched the point with absolute accuracy; and though her argument might easily be turned or evaded, the reasoning that might silence her could hardly convince, much less satisfy, his own native truthfulness. Too proud even to seem to ask the fulfilment of a patron's promise by suggesting that the opportunity had arisen, he was too clear-sighted not to feel that to that pride he was in some degree sacrificing the obedience due to his father's last direction. Even if he could have paltered with his own conscience, he could not bewilder Amy's simplicity with sophistry that might perplex her, or appeal to her simple confidence in his judgment against the instinctive sense of right and truth which, of all that was charming and lovable in her, he most esteemed and admired.

The discussion, however, was dropped, and the question was solved for him. A few weeks later, one of the rare visitors to the tiny furnished cottage, chosen for Amy's sake in what was then the half-rural suburb below Highgate Hill, was Evans, now the Editor of a morning journal slowly but surely achieving reputation and influence under his able guidance.

"You are a most fortunate soldier, Darcy," he said, after he had been introduced to Amy and had exchanged a few words on business with his young friend and contributor. "You will be able, I trust, to receive your Cross from the Queen in person; and what is perhaps of more practical importance to your career, though not equally gratifying to your pride,

your step is, I believe, secure. The 36th suffered terribly at Sivapore; and though the rest of the regiment has sustained no disaster, it has not taken so forward a part in all the recent operations without heavy losses. Great interest I have no doubt has been made for you; I can perhaps guess whose, since I have learnt that the ladies whom you saved at the Residency were your companions in your homeward voyage. But it is so managed, I believe, that you will receive your troop without purchase. And that is not all. The rest is a secret, but I should hardly have been allowed to know it if there were any risk that in telling you I should expose you to disappointment. There will be before long an Indian *brevet*; and if by that time you have gained your step, and I presume you will, they talk of another *brevet* step for you. It is long indeed since so young a man ever obtained such advancement; but even the Army will hardly grumble, and the newspapers will certainly be on your side, as they would be if the brilliancy of your exploits had been less real than it was. The Government may be afraid to reward slow and steady merit by a single irregular or unusual promotion; but it is always safe to deal liberally with a popular hero."

"I shall be sorry," said Darcy, slowly, "to owe anything to what you call popularity, and certainly sorry also to receive favours which many elder and better men will bitterly envy. I don't pretend that if they think a man worthy of the Cross they should not give him a *brevet* step also; but when one knows how many men have gone unrewarded by such a lift

for long and splendid service, it does not seem right that it should be given in the case of one more fortunate individual."

"Well," returned Evans, "two wrongs don't make a right. They would not amend their injustice to others by omitting to reward you."

"Unluckily," said Darcy, "that is just the reverse of the truth. Favour to a younger man in the way of promotion does injure scores of others; and while seniority is a rule so seldom violated, every violation of it is resented as an injury, not only by those who relied on the rule, but by all who feel that they were as well entitled as any one to have been exceptions."

"I see," said Evans, turning to Amy, who had listened in silence but with evident displeasure to a conversation which in her eyes disparaged her brother's claims, "you cannot bear to hear of Lionel's 'good luck.' But, after all, there must be many able and brave men who miss the advancement they deserve simply for want of a chance of proving their qualities; half a dozen probably for each who gets such a chance as his: I am quite willing to allow that there are probably threescore who, if they got the opportunity, would make nothing of it. But I must make my peace with you by something better than an excuse. It is only the third night of the new opera, but our critic, who was there on the first two performances, don't care to attend again, and I have brought you our tickets."

The girl's countenance brightened at once, and her sparkling eyes told how much she appreciated the novel pleasure.

“I would not ask Lionel,” she said, “but I never heard an opera, and I have wished above all things to hear one.”

“You must not ask your brother to commit such wanton extravagance, Miss Darcy. We cannot, of course, promise you places exactly when and where you please; but you may be sure of seeing one night or another every piece at every theatre you may fancy, without its costing him more than your cab fare. I see neither you nor he understand the privileges of the profession. Half a year’s experience of London may induce you to think with me, that your brother would be better employed in cutting up Ministers and slashing books than in slaughtering Natives; especially as the Ministers and the authors have not the privilege of slashing in return.”

“Does that enhance the pleasure of attacking them, Mr. Evans? When I read your bitter attack on the Leader of Opposition this morning, I could not help thinking there was something cowardly about the anonymous system.”

“That is too long a question to discuss now, Miss Darcy. After your brother has had a year’s experience of newspaper work he may be able to explain to you, when you are at a loss to find employment for a long winter evening at home, how deeply that principle is involved in the whole system of English journalism, how widely the character of our newspapers would be altered if articles were signed by their writers. As an Editor I should not like the change, for it would destroy one-half my power. But an honest writer will never send in an article to which

he would not sign his name, if required ; or rather, will never write what he would not sign, for often he must omit much that he would feel bound to add if independent of editorial control and responsible for his own work."

"Then do you mean that a writer is not responsible? Of course I don't mean to the law or personally, but morally. If the article is unjust or one-sided to his knowledge, is he not guilty of wilful untruth and injustice?"

"If he makes it wilfully unfair, of course he is an accomplice in wrong-doing, though I am afraid the sin is too common, I might say too universal, to be duly appreciated. But—no!—to your question as to responsibility. The writer is responsible to the Editor, the Editor alone is responsible for what appears."

"And in what sense responsible, and to whom?" asked Lionel. "You blew me up pretty sharply for my last article, and made it quite clear that it must have gone in without your reading it."

"In all professions, Darcy, one must now and then answer for over-confidence. I did not think you would write such a diatribe on such a subject, or I should have held it over till I could read it."

"But," said Amy, "responsibility, I suppose, implies some penalty that might at least be exacted here or hereafter? What penalty attaches to an Editor's sins, whether his own or those of his contributors?"

"Discredit to his paper in the first place, which he feels very keenly ; and I suppose we shall have to answer hereafter for our personal sins in professional

as well as in social life ; though if so, it will go hard with us."

"In that case," said Darcy, smiling, "I am afraid it will be necessary to provide a special department for newspaper Editors in what Coleridge calls 'the prisons below;' and, present company excepted, there will be very few journalists in Paradise."

"I suppose not," retorted his friend. "It would be no Heaven to us where we could not abuse one another, any more than to you where you cannot fight."

"There you are mistaken, Mr. Evans," interposed Amy. "I cannot get Lionel to talk about the fighting he saw and shared in India. All he will say is, that it was so horrible that if we were ever likely to have such another war he would resign his commission at once."

"Yes, Miss Darcy ; and he says things of the same kind so often and so bitterly in print, that I am obliged to cut out half of them ; and every article of his on India brings me a dozen letters of furious abuse from soldiers and civilians, or still more frequently from their kinsfolk at home, and at least half a dozen daily threats of withdrawal from subscribers."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said Darcy, half penitently. "But the present temper of our people sickens me, and makes me look with terror to the future of India under our rule."

"Oh," said his friend, "nothing tells so much in favour of a young writer, nothing suits a newspaper so well, as to provoke abuse. But you are mistaken,

Darcy, at least as regards the future. Englishmen are always savage when they are frightened—remember 1745 and 1798—and three years hence all this vindictive feeling, which after all prevails chiefly among the sitters at home, will be forgotten.”

Her first opera was, of course, a supreme delight to Amy; and her brother, comparatively indifferent himself, found, in watching the frank unsophisticated pleasure expressed in her countenance, more gratification than music, singing, and acting could have given to a disposition less critical and more artistic than his own. Thereafter, it was a sufficient compensation for the self-sacrifice to take her twice a week, on the evenings which are comparatively holiday intervals for the men employed on the daily press, to one after another of the London theatres, then much less numerous than now, and for that very reason mostly better organized. Those were the days when Kean and Wigan produced piece after piece of spectacular splendour or high dramatic interest, every part well sustained by well-qualified, well-drilled actors, disciplined to support one another as effectually as trained soldiers. Their companies did not consist of one or two very meteoric “stars” and a dozen very wooden sticks; nor were plays as a rule written, translated, or manufactured simply to afford to one favourite performer opportunities of self-display in one or two set familiar characters. Once, Amy’s remarks on a first performance seemed to Lionel so intelligent, apt, and pointed that, on their return, he allowed her to sit up far later than her usual hour, and induced her to assist him to embody them in a volunteer criticism;

which to her great delight appeared in full in the next edition of the *Courier*. She was not, however, so easily reconciled as was her brother to the few corrections in which he recognized the practised hand of the Editor, and which as a matter of course spoilt or cut out precisely those sentences in which in their joint composition the pair had taken most especial satisfaction. But pleasantly as two evenings in the week were thus spent, the other five were generally weary indeed to Amy, who protested in vain against the *fiat* of her brother condemning her perforce to retire to rest at a reasonable hour, not long after he himself had generally left her to seek the somewhat uncertain employment depending on late telegraphic or Parliamentary reports. But less from any word of his than from her own quick sympathy and feminine tact, Amy was aware that, after so spending most of his evenings, her brother made a real effort and serious sacrifice in giving up to her amusement out-of-doors those he would naturally have preferred to spend in rest and quiet at home; and she forbore to murmur that so many evening hours must be spent in solitude, and so large a part of each morning wasted, as she felt it, before one who had reached home long after midnight could join her at the meal she could never be persuaded to enjoy alone. Shy and sensitive as her father and brother, inheriting the reserved habits of a family whose means had been so long utterly disproportionate to their rank and to their traditionary ideas, she had made few or no acquaintances; and was now, as she had been in the solitude of their Westmoreland home, solely dependent upon Lionel's

companionship. Nor did he choose to introduce to her any of those colleagues or professional rivals with whom his newspaper work naturally brought him into frequent and familiar contact. It was therefore no little surprise to her, a surprise which had at least the pleasure of novelty, when, with the formal courtesy he seldom neglected even in the intimacy of their home life, her brother asked her permission to bring to their table, on a Sunday evening that chanced to be at his disposal, one *collaborateur* of whom she had heard incidentally from him and from Evans, as perhaps the most valued and most influential writer on the *Courier*.

“Evans growls,” said Lionel, “at least twice a week over Philipson’s articles; but I don’t fancy he often alters them. Philipson understands the subject on which it seems to me we are all most ignorant and stupid, on which the entire English press are blind leaders of the blind—the affairs of continental Europe; and Evans, who is too strong a man to be ashamed or afraid of confessing ignorance, allows such a contributor much more license than, so far as I can learn, is permitted on any other journal. The other day he gave me a note to Philipson which I forgot to deliver till too late. He had just sent up his article when I found and gave it him. ‘The deuce!’ he said, ‘I should have had this sooner. Evans tells me to say so-and-so and so-and-so, and I have said as nearly as possible the direct opposite. Well, I could not have written what he wants, and if I had seen him I think I could have shown him he is quite wrong.’ The next morning, Amy, the article

appeared exactly as Philipson had written it, and I was by when he asked Evans how this came about. 'Well,' said our chief, 'I saw you had mastered the subject and that I had not; and though I don't know that I should have agreed with you, an article showing real comprehension of such a matter is too rare and valuable a thing to be spoilt.' "

"Well, but," said Amy, "surely any man of sense would have said that?"

"Philipson said," replied her brother, "that there was not another Editor in London who would have had the sense to do the thing, much less the freedom from petty vanity to avow it."

CHAPTER XV.

AT HOME.

“Who daily scribble for your daily bread.”

ALMOST any guest of intellect, culture, and good-breeding, familiar with all the topics of the day, would have been welcome to Amy; who, though scarcely conscious of it and resolute not to own it to herself, had begun to find not merely her solitude but the sole society of her beloved brother somewhat monotonous. But for the lessons in music and drawing which, out of an income even more limited than she was aware, her brother had ungrudgingly obtained for her, and to and from which, when not received at home, he never failed to escort her, time, despite a taste for reading and for work more persistent and discriminating than that of most ladies of twice her years, would have hung very heavily on her hands. Edward Philipson was a man of about thirty years of age, with little that was remarkable in face or figure except a slight but somewhat noticeable stoop, or rather forward inclination of the head, which gave especial effect to the sudden drawing up of his form and level glance of his bright expressive eyes from

under the wide overhanging brow, when some topic of unusual interest excited him to momentary animation, and the sudden change of attitude and the gesture of the outstretched arm and pointed finger emphasized a telling repartee or stinging sarcasm. Not entirely dependent on his pen, few understood why he had adopted for several years the laborious profession of a journalist, unrewarded by the repute and recognized influence which by men of his character and position is generally much more prized than mere pecuniary profit. But the fact of his pecuniary independence no doubt contributed to render the Editor, who was labouring with no little success to make for the *Courier* a great and profitable position, complaisant toward such an ally.

“Your servant, I suppose,” he said, as he took his coffee from Amy’s hand; “is he who was with your brother throughout his Indian campaign, and of whom he has once or twice spoken in such high terms?”

“Yes,” answered Amy, pleased with this notice of one whose martial bearing and lofty courtesy had highly impressed her, and made it seem awkward and unnatural to employ him in ordinary menial duties. “Afzul and my nurse, Crosthwaite—who had never gone six miles from the home in which she was born till she came with me to London—are our whole household, and most invaluable we find them both.”

“But they must be somewhat oddly assorted, surely?” said her guest, smiling. “An Arab warrior and the daughter of a Westmoreland peasant trained in an English household, who had never till middle

life seen any but Westmoreland folk, must have been at first strange company for one another? ”

“ They have both,” answered Amy, “ so much dignity and self-respect that, though Crosthwaite was not a little scared and startled at first, and still marvels now and then at his peculiar ways, they get on admirably on the whole.”

“ I can understand that, Miss Darcy. A London servant would have been half frightened, half curious at first, and very soon impertinent and inquisitive. But with just that distance and difficulty of exact appreciation which difference of race creates, your ex-jemadar and your confidential housekeeper must naturally regard one another much more as equals, and each respect the position and character of the other in a manner gratifying to the feelings of both.”

“ I fancied at first,” she replied, “ that an Asiatic warrior’s contempt of women would make his duties here repugnant to Afzul ; but nothing can be more respectful and considerate and at the same time more dignified than the courteous attention with which he renders every possible service to me. But it is much more like the attention of a gentleman to a lady with whom he is not yet on speaking terms than of an ordinary English man-servant.”

“ Or,” observed her guest, “ of a noble in her suite to a Princess.”

There was nothing in the tone or words, but something in the manner of the speaker, that gave a shade of complimentary meaning to the commonplace ; a compliment, however, if so intended, which Amy was

too perfectly simple and unaffected to observe ; and the conversation glided to other subjects.

“ No,” said Amy, in answer to a remark from her guest, “ you are the first of my brother’s colleagues or professional acquaintance to whom I have been introduced.”

“ Which makes the introduction,” he answered, “ as high a compliment as it is a pleasure. Otherwise I might have ventured to say that your brother shows his discretion, and the care with which he watches over such a charge.”

“ But he must make enemies by his exclusiveness ? ” she said, inquiringly.

“ I don’t think so, Miss Darcy. And if he did he would still be right. He gets on well enough, as I hope I do, with the multitude of men of whom we must make occasional companions, but whom we should hardly care to recognize as anything more. The strangely mixed character and quality of its members is one of the peculiarities of our profession. We are all of necessity on the footing of equals ; and yet there are branches of the profession, and important branches, scarcely any member of which nowadays has had the education or has the manners of a gentleman ; while among those who do what may be called its highest work you will find every variety of character, from men of high reputation, great ability, and profound interest in public affairs—the equals, perhaps, in everything but fortune of leading members of Parliament—down to mere hacks who have learnt by long practice to scribble a readable article on almost any subject with almost no knowledge of any,

and who have little more intelligence, conscience, or conviction than are requisite to make them useful as automatic pens in the editorial hand."

"And it is these men," said Lionel, "who make the most by their profession. They can take service with any paper that will employ them, without regard to its opinions or principles; while those who have convictions of their own are confined to one or two journals, have no chance to make any independent name or position, and if by chance, or change in the nanagement, they are thrown out, hardly know where to look for other employment."

"True," replied Philipson. "And that is the great evil of our anonymous system. I know one of the very best writers in London who is at this moment without employment, and with hardly a chance of it. He cannot write for us, because on scarcely any topic of the day does he agree with Evans. For twenty years he wrote, I should say the best, but certainly one-half the principal articles in the *Postman*—articles which, if signed with his name, would have made him as distinct a figure, as important a personage, in the public eye as the *Postman* itself. Only one or two men contributed more than he to make the position of that paper and the fortune of its proprietor. And now under a new management he is cut adrift without a prospect, and without a claim that could be put into words."

"But," said Amy, "his employers must be shamefully ungrateful, and such cases must surely be very rare?"

"I am afraid not, Miss Darcy. But the subject is

a painful one to those who may look forward to the same fortune themselves. None of us can render better service to the *Courier* than he did to the *Post-man*. And Evans may not live for ever, or might quarrel with the proprietor, if the latter be fool enough to quarrel with the man who is making his paper a great property and even a great power. There is no profession in the world in which the profits are so exclusively reaped by those who have little or nothing to do with making them."

"Is it not," inquired Amy, "a common complaint that soldiers, after the most brilliant service, are so poor that they can hardly give their children an education and a chance to start fair with those of comparatively undistinguished and even unsuccessful men, in a country that owes all its greatness to its soldiers and seamen?"

"True enough, Miss Darcy. But in entering the Army men know that it is a service whose rewards are not given in money; and perhaps it would be less noble than it is if it were a remunerative career. *En revanche*, soldiers are now, as they were from the beginning and ever will be, first favourites with those whose favour is worth more than fame or money, especially in their eyes; and a distinguished soldier may always hope to marry an heiress."

"Do you think," asked Darcy, somewhat indig-
nantly, "that a gentleman can do that?"

"Why not? I don't say that to marry for money is very consonant with the higher and more vital characteristics of a gentleman."

"Or to 'marry money'?"

“Not in that sense, of course. But a distinguished soldier, whatever his birth or rank, may be brought if he will into the best and wealthiest society; and, to say nothing of the favour he finds in the ladies’ eyes, is less than any other man without fortune accused of presumption, even by the family, in seeking a hand that can bestow wealth. And I suppose heiresses are not as a rule less amiable in real life than other women.”

“Lion,” said his sister, “you would not say that a man should be averse to marry a woman he loved because she chanced to be rich?”

“Exactly what I should say, Amy. Men don’t fall head over ears in love without warning, still less do they win a lady’s love without effort or consciousness; and as there are many cases in which men know and recognize that they must not—and therefore do not—pay court to certain ladies, I don’t see what excuse a man can plead for allowing himself to propose to an heiress, or for going so far that he can become doubtful what his duty in the matter is. What is the usual motive in such marriages we see in what men, and women too, always think of them. If a poor man marries a rich woman, society at once takes it for granted that he has ‘married money,’ as they say. Why, the very phrase implies that he has sought not the hand but the fortune it held.”

“Society,” returned Philipson, “always imputes the lowest motive to every act that is not obviously self-sacrificing or heroic, and to some that are.”

A pause of a few minutes followed, when the guest, who had been looking somewhat earnestly at his young hostess, said—

“Miss Darcy, surely—it seems to me—I have had the pleasure of meeting you before?”

“Ah, yes!” replied Amy frankly, her face brightening with surprise and pleasure. “It was you whom I met at Paddington. Lionel, it was Mr. Philipson who helped us so much when I came to meet you on the *Europa*, who told me all I had to do, found such convenient lodgings for us, and helped me to get on board and told me where to look for you. Indeed, he did not leave me till his attention was claimed by those he had come to meet.”

“I had no idea,” said Darcy, cordially, “how much I was indebted to you. It was no light or easy adventure for Amy, who had scarcely left home before, to travel so far alone and find me out in the crowd and bustle of the landing; and without your help I am afraid she would have had no little trouble and annoyance.”

“Yes, I was fortunate, as you said to the Southampton people, in the chance that fell to me,” returned the other; “more fortunate perhaps even than you, and without purchasing my good fortune at such a price; though, Darcy, Lady Helen spoke of you in a way you would have thought a reward for much good service, and Alice’s face, if not her lips, confirmed fully her mother’s praises.”

“You know them?” asked Lionel, interested to find his friend able to speak of those whom he had been so sorry to part from with little hope of meeting them again; and, despite himself, showing very plainly the pleasure which the incident afforded him.

“Yes;—I was asked to meet them. And Alice was

very anxious that they might be in London to witness the distribution of the Cross next week. Naturally; she had seen it earned in one case at least. But they are at Penrith Castle now, I believe, and Lady Helen's state is such that they are hardly likely to be in London this year."

"How is she?" asked Darcy. "I knew she was very ill when we landed, and had, I was pained to see, grown steadily worse during the voyage; but I hoped that at home she would have recovered."

"I fear she never will recover," replied Philipson, gravely; "the more so that I am sure she looks to death as the one thing she can hope or care for. Feeling her daughters safe and well provided for—did you know, Darcy, that Alice is heiress to a very handsome fortune?—she has nothing to hold her to life. Kavanagh was accused of marrying money, by the way, and marrying interest; but if ever there were a true love-match that was one. She lived only for him, and his death has given her a death-blow."

"I can believe that, after being in her company from that moment till our return home," said Darcy. "You are intimate with them, then?"

His friend, with some slight embarrassment, parried the question, and shortly afterwards excused his early departure on the plea of professional duty.

His next visit was paid on the evening of Darcy's return from the striking and impressive scene, in which he was a generally observed actor, when their Sovereign in person, attended by her husband and elder children, placed the Cross, that derived additional value from its association with her own name, on the

breasts of officers and soldiers, many of whom had won honourable wounds in maintaining her sovereignty against an Empire in rebellion. The honour thus bestowed, by the very hand of one for whom he felt all the intense reverence of Cavalier loyalty to the Royal person, deeply moved the young soldier; and, frankly as he accepted the congratulations of his colleague, he was so silent that evening that the conversation between Amy and their guest was almost a *tête-à-tête*. The cordial sympathy and generous admiration Philipson manifested for her brother would at any time have touched Amy deeply, and in her present mood of natural excitement and emotion she was even more than usually open to any kindly impression. Philipson lingered late that evening, despite the claim on his services preferred by the Editor in consideration of the approaching debate in Parliament, one on which the fate of a Ministry might depend. When at parting Amy for the first time gave her hand to her new friend, the pressure of his perhaps affected her as much as the contact of her own soft, warm fingers moved him; though she certainly did not share the conscious pleasure which not a little surprised the experienced and somewhat cold politician and writer, who had for years mingled with the world and had enjoyed at least the intimate acquaintance of many women of greater attractions, of more cultivated intelligence, and higher social claims.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEMESIS.

“The young man’s wrath is like light straw afire,
(Heard ye sae merry the little bird sing?)
But like red-hot steel is the old man’s ire
(And the throstle-cock’s head is under his wing).”

“LION,” said his sister, when they returned from a long walk in the lanes on the further side of Hampstead and Highgate, “here’s another note from Mr. Evans in his usual undecipherable scrawl. How do the printers read it, or the postmen either, for that matter? If I did not know, I think I hardly could have made out the name.”

Darcy seemed in no hurry to open the despatch, whose address fully justified Amy’s criticism. Editorial hands are in two cases out of three especially vile, but that of Evans was a standing jest among his acquaintance and staff, and provocative of half-earnest curses in the composing-room. “Two or three half-formed letters and a scrawl to each long word, and a scratch for each short one,” was the description bestowed on it by Philipson when he endeavoured in vain to make out some critical instruction.

“It covers tickets for Wednesday, Amy, I’ll bet you a pair of white gloves.”

“Now, Lion, what would a bet mean between us? If I win, you’ll give me the gloves, and if I lose you’ll give me the money to buy them. I do wish you would give me a certain sum, or tell me at least what I may spend upon myself.”

“My darling, would you take from me the pleasure of giving you everything; of discussing and choosing with you whatever we can afford? Besides, Amy, there is a reason why I cannot tell you the whole truth about our income. Part of it is spent beforehand in a way I cannot explain, and which perhaps I had no right to pledge; but when it was done I thought my income was my own. I did not expect that you would make a home for me, any more than I expected to settle in London.”

“How can you speak so, Lionel? As if your income were not chiefly your own earning, and the rest a gift to you only! I can guess what you have done with it, and do you think I would have had you do otherwise? But I hope Mr. Evans has not sent us tickets again; or if he has, don’t let us go. You never have an evening at home, and you have to be out four or five nights in the week. It cannot be, and I am sure it is not, a pleasure to you to spend the others in the same sort of way. Yes, it *is* the same for you; for I believe the theatre tires you almost as much as the office; and, of course, evenings alone are wearisome, but I would quite as soon, much sooner, spend them at home with you. Do let us have a quiet evening to-morrow.”

“Two nights’ amusement in the week, child, two evenings that give you something to look forward to

and remember, are little enough to brighten the long hours of your solitude. Here, take the letter; but," as he felt it, "I am afraid you will be disappointed."

"No indeed," said Amy, opening it and seeing at once that it contained no enclosure. "Ah, here is a note, though; I am afraid it is some more work for you."

"I hope it is. What does he say?"

"Nay, that I can't tell you; but something about 'the House' and something about Mr. Philipson."

"The House!" said Lionel. "He can't want me there. No, I don't make out what it is about, except 'Thursday'—'Philipson won't'—and 'attack on Government.' Oh, I suppose he wants me to write something about the Indian motion. Well, I must find out to-morrow what it is."

The Editor was talking with Philipson, who had just risen from his seat, as Darcy entered the *sanctum* of the *Courier*; a room crowded from floor to roof with books, files of newspapers, gazetteers, and maps, anything but arranged on open shelves; lighted or rather twilighted by a window looking out on a back court of about four times the area of the room itself, and shut in on every side by buildings many stories higher. The table was covered, or to speak accurately heaped, with papers, letters, articles, and writing materials, in a confusion amid which only an Editor could have laid his hand upon anything.

"Very well, then, Darcy must try his hand; though it is provoking, for of course he can't like you write in the gallery to the last moment, and you know we must have our leader-page in type by twelve. Ah,

Darcy! Good morning. Philipson can't, for reasons I need not go into just now, take the Indian debate. You have never yet tried your hand at a Parliamentary article, and I don't know how you will acquit yourself with no time to think. It is a critical theme, too, for the Opposition have made up their quarrels; and if beaten on this the Government must go out, though really the charge is only against the Board of Control."

"Darcy," said Philipson, "even before the Editor; I will let you into one or two tricks of the craft. As Evans says, there is no time to think over Parliamentary articles, except on papers that go to press long after the debate is closed" [All papers do so now; then the *Times* alone was printed on both sides at once, and one half the "formes" of all the penny papers left the composing-room and were finally printed off before the "inner side" was put to press]; "but take down the principal points of the speeches, saying 'so-and-so said this;' then add any remark that occurs to you at the moment, and in that way you will be able to make two of your three paragraphs. The first one you might do before you go down, and add a sentence or two to it at the last."

"That sounds like manufacturing an article rather than writing it," observed Darcy.

"True," said Evans, "and only a practised hand like Philipson can help making the automatism too evident. No, you must write outside. Leave the House at eight, and make the most of what has been done then; go back at ten—there is never much worth noting in the dinner hours—and make what

you can of the after speeches in Philipson's fashion. Of course you must send it up slip by slip; our messengers leave every half-hour. Now," after his elder contributor had left, "the truth, as far as I need tell you, is this. Lord Penrith had received the despatches on which the Government have acted, which the Viceroy wrote before learning his resignation. The official papers he sent to Everglade, of course, but he is believed to have kept back some private explanations till the Government were hopelessly committed. You must hint this, not say it; or perhaps, unless it is said in the House, best leave it to me. For that reason Philipson could hardly take it up, don't you see?"

Darcy did not see; but into the personal feelings of his colleague it did not seem proper to him to inquire, and Evans took his comprehension for granted.

It was the first time that Darcy had been present at a great debate, almost the first occasion on which he had witnessed a sitting of the House of Commons. Finding his way, with the help of an acquaintance among the reporting staff, to the long bench at the back of the gallery overhanging the Speaker's huge wooden canopy, which affords to the London Press the utmost possible facility of hearing speeches addressed "to the Chair," he looked with interest on the crowded benches, recognizing with the aid of *habitués* around him one after another of the most distinguished members on either side:—the frank, bright, wakeful face of the Leader of Opposition, the youthfulness of his air contrasting his perfectly white hair and wrinkled features, a certain good-humoured *insouciance*

expressing the kindly temper as familiar to Englishmen as the restless viciousness of his political action to foreigners who knew him only as the demon of revolution; and by his side a younger colleague, the leader of a generation who had been children when the octogenarian chief was already a great Cabinet Minister, with a face showing far more distinct traces of worn nerves and temper irritated by political conflict—the middle-aged pedagogue beside the superannuated schoolboy; again, lower down, the broad stalwart form, the round vigorous manly English face of the most English of orators and most un-English of politicians—the most personally pugnacious, virulent, and insulting of speakers, the most abjectly pacific by political profession and religious creed of an ignoble and immoral school; finally, on the front bench opposite, the strange, inscrutable, ironical countenance of the Leader of the House, with the black curls already mixed with grey, and the features so unlike any type of Norman, Celtic, or Saxon race, that stood out so markedly among the forms and faces—frank, hearty, sometimes noble and intellectual, always simple and manly—of the English country gentlemen around him.

Benches and galleries were crammed, every seat occupied, and the space between the bar, as it is called, and the entrance filled with standing members of a House which does not pretend to afford seats for more than two-thirds of those who “sit” there. Questions that for the most part interested only those who sought notoriety by putting them, at the risk of a telling snub from one who knew exactly whom he

could safely snub carrying with him the sympathy of the audience, were put and answered for three quarters of an hour, amid a patience that seemed to Darcy somewhat surprising; though rewarded by one or two moments of interest, when some thrust that seemed likely to elicit a perilous truth or damaging confession was adroitly parried by the Minister assailed. Then Mr. Speaker murmured something inaudible, and from the front bench of the Opposition rose the late Secretary of the Board of Control, amid the eager cheers of a party who looked to see him win their way to office, and the settling of persons and folding of papers among the supporters of the Government on the Speaker's right. The duller portions of each speech afforded Darcy leisure to take accurate note of the more telling points, and to insert comments of the character recommended by his more experienced friend; but when an actually tedious speaker rose the whispering, and more than whispering, of those about him distracted his attention much more than the necessity of listening to the orators themselves; and it was with difficulty that by ten o'clock he had composed the first two paragraphs of the three inexorably required in every leading article.

As often happens to young writers, the article next morning read, even in its author's estimation, much better than had seemed possible. His chief at any rate was satisfied, and on the next night Darcy resumed his work with more self-confidence and less conscious fatigue. Saturday and Sunday afforded a period of welcome rest. On Monday, the contest was to recommence.

“Be early,” said his chief, “for you will find the Gallery very crowded. There will be what they call a scene, if we are truly informed; they say that Sir Francis Clavering has the whole story in hand. He is the staunchest partisan in the House, and never yet has deserted his party in difficulty or disgrace, though he resigned office twenty years ago without explanation, and it has since been pressed upon him in vain. If he turns upon them now, that fact alone will tell; and his personal reputation and character would give weight to a much worse speaker than he. Mind, whatever he says, to treat him with the profoundest respect; and if he takes that line, remember his speech is the speech of the night. Anything else is wholly secondary. Indeed, if you can, you might make him your sole subject, and I’ll get some one else to skim the debate at large.”

Darcy was about to leave when his chief recalled him.

“Perhaps I had better tell you all that is rumoured of the story, because we must not put our foot in it. Lord Penrith’s second wife was Sir Francis’ sister, and is said to have lived very unhappily with him. These things are just as likely to be lies as not; but I believe it is true that Sir Francis had, some twenty years ago, a bitter quarrel with his brother-in-law. Lord Penrith has the worst possible moral reputation, so much so that his being highly placed in nearly every Cabinet of his party has given rise to a good deal of unpleasant comment. For example, he is a man who always *compromises* women. He is not on speaking terms with either of his sons; the infirmities

of the elder are said to be due to his mother's sufferings, and I know that it was on his account that his brother finally quarrelled with the Earl. Indeed, of all his children his eldest daughter is the only one who is believed to be on terms with him. There is another version of the quarrel with Clavering, I believe, but I never heard it clearly told. Only remember to keep everything like a suggestion of vengeance, which might be supposed to refer to the personal feud, carefully out of your article."

There was something in the air and manner of members, in the very atmosphere of the House, that told, even to so inexperienced an observer as Darcy, of eager and anxious expectation, of keen but suppressed excitement. The close oppressive air, the black clouds, do not more distinctly foretell a thunderstorm than the contagious feeling that thrilled through every cranny of the crowded Chamber, and reached all the least interested of those who attended by mere accident or in the pursuance of the dullest professional duty, predicted a moral explosion. On the Notice-paper stood, in the name of Sir Francis Clavering, an amendment imputing in the strongest Parliamentary terms grave misconduct to Lord Penrith, as the cause and excuse of what was almost admitted as an error on the part of the Ministry. When the questions were over and the inaudible murmur had again been heard from the Chair, the whole crowded assembly subsided into a sudden and extraordinary silence, a hush of intensest excitement and expectation. The general purport of the assistance the Ministry were to receive from a most unexpected quarter was of

course rumoured, but the details of the story were unknown.

“They say,” a colleague had whispered to Darcy a few moments before, “that Sir Francis is the bitter personal enemy of his brother-in-law. His whole story is a strange and sad one. You know, for fifteen years the ugliest scandals were circulated about his married life; till, some eighteen years ago, the truth came out as Lady Clavering’s insanity became notorious. There was some family quarrel, some story affecting a lady related to Sir Francis; and they said at the time that but for their relationship Penrith could not have kept clear of a duel. That was more than twenty years ago, and ever since Sir Francis has steadily supported Ministries of which Lord Penrith has been a member; but he is a man to take vengeance effectually if his time have really come.”

“Silence! Silence!” was whispered imperatively and quickly along the front line of reporters, hanging over their desks with note-book in hand, and passed on to the second row, where those about to relieve them were mingled with other members of the Press. And now from below the gangway, on the Opposition side, rose a figure unknown to Darcy; not perhaps more than once or twice in the course of a Parliament seen to interpose in debate, but never interposing without commanding profound attention and the respect always paid, at least in those days, by the House to high character, more than average intelligence, birth, rank, and fortune combined. Slight in frame, of medium stature, evidently feeble, perhaps

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less from age than health, the central object of all eyes drew himself up erect for a few moments; and then, as he began to speak—with a countenance full of strong excitement evidently repressed by stern resolution—leaned forward, resting his hands on a staff, and commenced his speech in a low measured tone, but with a practised art that made every syllable audible in every corner. He told in words most carefully chosen—cold, weighty, accurate, without hesitation but speaking slowly and pausing now and then to give full effect to each fact—the story of what was, as he stated it, no less than a deliberate and most discreditable fraud; whereof, doubtless imperfectly acquainted with its worst features, the Opposition had snatched the advantage. If by a technical rule, applicable rather to domestic than to public life, the papers retained by the ex-Minister had been private in form and address, they were in fact confidential letters to the President of the Board of Control from the Governor-General of India. Sir Francis, familiar with the usages of office, had no difficulty in demonstrating that the form of private letters had been given them, by order of Lord Penrith or a predecessor, to avoid the necessity of laying them before Parliament; that they were by the clearest rules of the department, as well as by every law of honour and common sense, the property not of the ex-Minister who had withheld them, but of the Minister for the time being from whom they had been concealed. They contained, in fact, that full and sufficient explanation in the absence of which the latter had almost necessarily fallen into the error for which the

Opposition had called him to account. Stated with perfect temper and admirable lucidity, the case amounted to an impeachment of Lord Penrith's personal honour as well as his public conduct; and those who knew how certainly Sir Francis' statements of fact might be trusted felt that answer there could be none. The dismay he caused was visible even on the cheery and impassive face of his leader and in the dead silence of his party. Told thus coldly and precisely, the facts left to common sense and common honesty could bear but one construction. The few bitter scathing comments with which the accuser enforced them never strayed into personality, never contained an unparliamentary or exaggerated expression, and yet possessed a stinging severity of their own doubled at least by the high character and position of the speaker. The conclusion rose into something like the eloquence of profound moral indignation; and when finally, turning to the place where the accused ex-Minister sat under the gallery, and pointing with his hand, the orator addressed almost directly to his enemy one of the most familiar of Horatian quotations—

“*Raro antecedentem scelestum
Deseruit pede Pœna claudo*”—

the trite peroration was received with a thundering burst of cheers from the right, a dismayed and sullen silence on the left, which pronounced the doom, not only of the motion directed against the Ministry, but of the statesman whose craft had thus been made to recoil upon himself. Darcy, whose eyes, in common

with those of three-fourths of the assembly, were turned upon Lord Penrith, saw the grey-haired ex-Minister tremble and turn pale, despite all the practised self-control taught by a lifetime of official and Parliamentary experience. When the rising of another speaker gave the sign for a general movement and half the House had crowded out to dinner, the object of this terrible attack had disappeared; and all those who knew the history or had heard the rumour of a long-cherished enmity felt that the vengeance of a lifetime had been accumulated and discharged in a single hour, with an effect that should satisfy to the full not merely the claims of justice, but feelings that must be fierce and bitter indeed if unsoftened by so long a period of apparent peace and absolute silence.

As Darcy passed out through the low, dark, inconvenient antechambers of the Reporters' Gallery and reached the narrow, twisting stone back-stair on which they open, Evans laid a hand on his shoulder.

"This is more, far more, than I expected. I was under the gallery, near my Lord, and if I had hated him as I never hated man yet, I should have been forced to pity him. P——n cares little for character; but he can never put that man in office again. Come to the Lobby. I want to hear what is to be the result; but of course the motion must be dropped. The question is what Sir Francis will do?"

By several back passages unknown to the general public, the Editor and his young assistant made their way into the lobby immediately outside the doorway of the House, wherein meet galleries connecting it

with every part of the vast building in which our Legislature is housed. Evans had caught and spoken to two or three men of minor public fame but of great practical influence on either side, when an influx of members caused the police to waive back strangers from the centre of the crowded lobby; and Darcy and his chief were wedged into the corner next the House, upon the left of the doorway. Immediately on their left was the entrance leading to the library, reading, dining, and smoking-rooms, whose convenience, and the friendly intercourse that takes place therein among five or six hundred of the foremost politicians of three kingdoms, have won for the House of Commons the name of "the best club in London." From this entrance emerged Sir Francis Clavering and a tall, well-built, jovial-looking man in the prime of life, whom Evans pointed out to Darcy as that most important functionary, the chief Whip of the Opposition—when in office the Patronage Secretary of the Treasury. The latter was too eager to be careful, and his words of remonstrance were audible, at least to those who stood nearest.

"Really, Clavering, this is too much. You have ruined our chance: I say nothing of that. If we had known all this, we should not have been such fools as to lay ourselves open to so terrible a retort. But if we drop the attack you must drop the amendment. You have done the Government the best turn they have ever received from our side; you have ruined Penrith. I don't like him; but you know how useful he has been; and it would be sheer perversity to push the matter further. What motive can you have for turning our defeat into a rout?"

“The motive,” answered Sir Francis, coldly and in a low tone, “that I had for defeating you. If party spirit is not to lower us to the American level, dishonour must not be condoned for party reasons; and such malpractices as this must be pressed home and punished.”

“Take care,” said the other, “that you don’t defeat your own end. The House never likes a beaten man pressed too hard, hates to destroy the personal character even of an unpopular statesman; and D—— himself (the Government leader) would not thank you for carrying the matter further. Men will say that you have made public spirit the cover of personal vengeance.”

Sir Francis turned angrily at these words; and, turning, his look fell full on the face of Darcy, who stood within a few steps. He started; the words of contemptuous defiance died on his tongue, and he remained silent for a full minute, his eyes still intently fixed on the young man’s countenance. Then with an effort he answered the Whipper-in, who already felt that his eagerness had led him into a tactical blunder.

“If,” he said, drily, “you were not very sure that I can carry my motion, you would not be so anxious to have it withdrawn.”

“Well, well, that may be; we know how the Independents and the demagogues will use such a matter, and of course all the Ministerialists will be whipped in to a man to support you. But it can’t be your wish to deal so damaging a blow to those you have so long and so steadily supported.”

“I don’t care to discuss the matter further,” replied Sir Francis, his looks still turning from moment to moment to the group pressed back into the corner. “If I change my mind before five to-morrow I will let you know; but tell P—— he must make up his mind independently of me: I will not be a party to any compromise.”

He shook off the detaining hand of the anxious Whip, and beckoned to Evans; who, after a few moments’ whispered conversation, brought him to Darcy.

“Major Darcy,” said the Baronet, with a marked politeness, in which the wish to be cordial seemed to conflict with habits of coldness or conscious motives for reserve, “I am glad to have met you here. You know that we are relatives, if somewhat distant. Let me be among the first to congratulate you, if I am somewhat late in expressing the pride I felt in learning how nobly the last member of a family once well known to me had sustained its honour.”

Not a little surprised by the title bestowed, a slight emphasis upon which seemed to indicate that the error was intentional, and moved by something in the look and manner of the old man that seemed to imply deeper and more disturbing feeling than found utterance in his compliment, Darcy faltered a not very well constructed or coherent reply. A slight and somewhat painful smile parted the pale thin lips before Sir Francis rejoined—

“I might not have met you for some time but for this accident; now perhaps,” he paused and hesitated—“perhaps we may chance to meet again.”

He seemed about to hold out his hand in farewell; then stopped, and added in a different and more earnest tone—

“Remember, if at any time or in any way I can serve your—father’s son, I shall be happy to do so. Major Darcy, I mean what I say: do not fail to afford me the opportunity whenever I can forward your career or gratify your wishes.”

The mover of so critical an amendment, the author of an impeachment so terrible and so effective, was the object of all eyes in the lobby, in which were now gathered more than a hundred of those members of the Third and Fourth Estates in whose power is the gift of social fame or the stigma of social notoriety; and as Sir Francis, with marked courtesy and kindness, shook hands with his new-found relative, the evident earnestness of the greeting, as had been intended, drew on the young soldier no little attention. A question and answer were murmured from one to another; and when Evans, aware that he had no more time to lose, drew his contributor away, their retirement was delayed by not a few requests for an introduction from leading members of the Press, and military members of the House. It was late before Darcy could finish an article, nearly every sentence in which had to be carefully considered and discussed in detail with the Editor; and when he reached home, the fire studiously arranged by Amy for his comfort, at the latest hour at which her brother’s care would allow her to retire, had long been extinguished. It was with an aching and whirling head, perplexed and stimulated by the scene he had witnessed and the

personal attentions he had received, that he sought his bed; it was with much less than his usual facility, acquired in yet more anxious and yet more exciting scenes, that he dismissed the conjectures and comments which chased one another through his heated brain, and at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

VENUS VICTRIX.

“ And down she kneeled,
 So sorrowful, so fair,
 The heart must have been triply steeled,
 That could resist her prayer.”

It was near noon the next day when he was startled from a somewhat restless slumber by the dreamy consciousness of a soft hand laid on his own, the touch of soft lips on his brow ; and starting up saw that, for the first time since he had left their home to join his regiment, Amy was bending over his pillow. Her eyes had filled as they were fixed on the upper part of a broad crimson scar, as yet scarcely healed, that, concealed by the stiff collar of daily wear, was for the first time exposed to her eyes. A frown, evidently of annoyance and not of anger, contracted his brows as he hastily drew the shirt over it. It was characteristic both of his personal weakness and soldierly reserve that his sister had scarcely induced him to speak of his wounds, and that the exposure, even to her eyes, of the disfigurement they had left was an actual vexation. Still he was so far ashamed of the feeling that it was unrealized even by his sister's quick observation and affectionate tact ; and as her fingers parted his

straggling locks she observed, "I see now why you always wear your hair so funnily, Lion. That is an ugly scar on your head; but, in your place, I should have been too proud to hide it. Nay, don't be angry with me about that; I am afraid you will have something graver to scold me for, so I have brought you to begin with what should put you in your best humour;" and folding down that day's *Courier*, and pointing with her finger to a paragraph in its smallest type, she placed it under his eyes.

"Am I ever in ill-humour with you, Amy?" he said, turning from the journal pressed on his notice, to look fondly into her sparkling eyes and smooth her long dark curls as she knelt beside him.

"Not yet, Lion; but I should not dare to give you reason. Gentleness to women is of course a point of honour with the men of our caste, but I don't think it would be proof against the temper and the spirit that form a more prominent part of those unamiable traditions of which you, like Papa, are so proud."

"Far less proud, Amy, than of you. What would be left to either of us, darling, if we could quarrel with each other?"

Amy shook her long curls with a look half saucy, half doubtful, and answered with a kiss her brother's affectionate speech and the look of fondness and pride in her that accompanied it.

"Now, Lionel, look there before I say anything else."

Obedient to her playful command, he took up the paper and read the sentences to which she pointed, copied from the *Gazette* of the day before.

"36th Lancers. Major and brevet-Lieutenant-

Colonel Vane V.C. to be Lieutenant-Colonel, *vice* Arnold, deceased ; Lieutenant Lionel Darcy V.C., to be Captain (without purchase), *vice* Calmont, killed in action."

"Yes, but that is not all," said Amy, as he looked up to meet the proud congratulation of her loving eyes; "look there," and she pointed to a paragraph in the Brevet that followed.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Vane V.C., of the 36th Lancers, to be Colonel in the army; Captain Lionel Darcy V.C., to be Major in the army."

"I understand now," he observed, after a few moments. "Sir Francis Clavering, Amy, spoke to me in the Lobby last night, and to my great surprise addressed me as 'Major.'"

A slight cloud came over the sweet face that looked into his own.

"Ah!" she said, "I have not read his speech, but I read your article; and, Lionel, it is terrible, even if the whole story is exactly true. When you were so bitter, did you ever remember what Mr. Evans once suggested—to whom you owed the interest that has secured you your promotion?"

"I hope not, and I don't think so. If I did, I would rather renounce it than accept a favour from Lord Penrith. But this is one of those cases in which it is impossible to do or even to find out anything. If you had read Sir Francis's speech, Amy, and knew how high is his reputation for accuracy—if you could understand how little such a man would dare to make such statements unless they could be proved to the letter—you would not think my article too severe."

“I know,” she replied, “that you will not allow women the right to meddle in men’s business at all; and of course you and Mr. Evans are far better judges in such a matter than we can be. But even if the scourge be deserved, I am sorry your hand should wield it. If he were our father’s enemy—and, after all, we do not know that—remember he is a very old man; and this is a terrible fall if, as you say, he can never be allowed to serve the Queen again. No,” as he was about to reply, somewhat sternly, “please say no more now. Don’t come down in a hard or angry mood.”

“Is it to prevent that you have brought my breakfast here?” he asked, smiling, perceiving for the first time the tray arranged with all the neatness her deft hands and affectionate care could give to it. “Amy, I must have been behaving worse than I had any idea of, to call from you such entreaties and such precautions.”

“No, no, Lionel; you will understand by-and-by. I dare say you will be angry with me; I cannot help it, and I had rather it were with me.”

“I think I can promise, Amy, that at least you shall not know it. Surely,” as he observed the anxious look on her face, “you cannot be afraid of me? I don’t know how to scold; at least I never tried. No, child, you cannot . . .”

“I *am* afraid, though, Lion,” she answered, with a certain mischievous stress on the pet name. “Wild beasts may mean to be kind; but, if stories are true, they don’t always remember to sheathe their talons, even with their own. But I was not thinking so much

of myself. Do listen, and consider what I say, Lionel. I know you well, and I know how likely you are to be hard where you feel most softly, to do what you think stern justice exactly when and where you are most afraid of yielding to your own wishes and affections. Now, for God's sake, don't hit hard to-day. I have heard so much of your story that perhaps I know more of it than you know yourself; and if you are hard now, I am sure you will regret it from the first moment when it is too late to the last of your life. Scold me for meddling if you like; a few angry words to me would matter little, even though they would be the first."

"What is it, Amy?" inquired her brother, feeling not a little curious and somewhat anxious under these repeated hints and mysterious warnings.

"Nay, I cannot tell you, Lion. You will know very soon; and I don't know, only I can guess."

She had nearly reached the door when, half turning and lifting one finger in a pretty significant gesture of playful warning, she repeated two or three lines of his favourite legend:—

"Steel, that maiden fingers bend;
Men may bootless plead and 'plain—
Never woman sued in vain."

She laid a perceptible emphasis on the last line, but, allowing him no time to question or wonder at her meaning, added: "Now I am going; dress and come down as quickly as you can; but," she added, turning at the door, "don't forget your breakfast; I know that may make a difference in your mood."

It was as well that Lionel was averse to vex his

sister even by such a trifle as the disregard of her last injunction, for it had more truth in it than men of his age are ever aware. It takes the experience of half a life to know in one's own case how much one's view, one's conduct, even in matters of profoundest importance, may depend upon physical condition, and such a trifle as the question whether one enters on a discussion full or fasting.

Approaching the door of his sister's little drawing-room, a low murmur of voices within warned Lionel that she was not alone; that she had companions whose tones were unquestionably feminine.

"Who can they be?" he thought. "I am glad if she has found any friend or acquaintance. It is hard, and not very well, for a girl to have no woman friend, and no companion of her own age and sex."

But as he entered, it was a hard task to still the sudden and violent beating of his heart and repress the overwhelming rush of feelings of mingled surprise, delight, and dismay when he recognized, still in deep mourning, the two girls from whom he had parted just before the painful and startling meeting with Amy herself. Self-possessed and calm as she usually was, it was not Alice who first came forward to offer her hand and answer his eager greeting. Her younger sister, commonly shy and silent, had answered mournfully his inquiries after Lady Helen before Alice could do more than return in silence and with evident agitation the pressure of his hand. There was something so unlike the intimacy of their late and prolonged intercourse in the slightness and shortness of her hand-clasp—something of such visible reserve in

her manner—that Lionel, never a quick observer, unfamiliar with the signs of feminine feeling, and perfectly free from that kind of coxcombry which enables many men to read and exaggerate all evidences of emotion in the other sex that can regard themselves, was chilled and pained.

“Mamma,” said the younger girl, “would have liked to call on Miss Darcy; but we came to London only three days ago because grandpapa insisted that she should see Dr. A—— and Sir B. C——, and she was quite worn out with the journey, and is too ill now to leave her room; otherwise she would not have let Alice and me come alone. But,” the girl continued, when her silent appeal to her sister was unnoticed, “she told Alice to say how sorry she was not to see your sister and yourself.”

Darcy had expressed in a few considerate words a heartfelt sorrow at tidings which could not surprise him, addressing himself to the last speaker, though his eyes anxiously sought to interpret her sister’s half-averted face; when, by one of those feminine manœuvres which even girls so easily accomplish and which men never attempt to imitate without entangling themselves in manifest and disastrous confusion, Amy drew her younger guest from the room and left Alice alone with her brother. Then for the first time Lionel recognized that the visit had a meaning, and by an instantaneous chain of reasoning connected its purport with Amy’s previous pleading. But Alice seemed more depressed, more disturbed, than he had ever seen her; and, ignorant of the reason, though remembering with most uncom-

fortable apprehensions, what strangely enough he had in the interest of his professional work forgotten, her connection with Lord Penrith, Lionel was in no condition to relieve her perplexity. He hoped she did not know of his relation with the *Courier*, but he felt utterly unable to find at the moment any of those commonplaces of conversation which serve to break the awkward silence sure to occur, when two persons are forced to approach topics in which both have a keen interest, and from which both for one reason or another are disposed to shrink. But, as usually happens, the young lady was the first to regain presence of mind and self-possession.

“Major Darcy,” she said, “I should congratulate you—I don’t like to use such a mere form in speaking of what you know should and must interest us all so much—but I wish to tell you how pleased I—my mother and we were, to see how your Indian services had been recognized. I suppose it is very rare for so young a man to have deserved and obtained such promotion and such honour?”

“Very rare indeed, Miss Kavanagh; so rare that I could hardly have understood it had I not been told that I probably owe much to your mother’s interest.”

Alice looked much surprised. “I don’t think so,” she replied. “My grandfather seemed so little pleased when we spoke about you that Mamma said no more on the subject. No, if you are indebted to any one for what I hope was given from a mere sense of right and justice, it is more likely that Sir Francis——” She hesitated, paused, and turned the conversation; the name of her grandfather’s enemy helping her to

enter upon the object of her visit. "Major Darcy, you would not wish, I think, to give Mamma and all of us bitter and cruel pain. I think you would spare us if you could, if only because you have been so kind already. I have seen Edward this morning. I persuaded Mamma to let us go to him, but he refused to interfere, as Mamma evidently thought he would."

She paused again, but had now raised to Darcy's face the eyes which when she began had been fixed upon the ground; and there was in their glance an appeal which a man interested no otherwise than by her beauty, and the frank earnest expression of a countenance unusually and especially noble and loyal in character, would have found it hard to resist. To Lionel Darcy, suddenly conscious of the pain he must have inflicted on the last person in the world whose resentment, displeasure, or disapproval he would have willingly incurred, that appeal was intensely painful and irresistibly powerful.

"Miss Kavanagh," he answered, "I use no empty words, no phrase of compliment, when I say from my heart that nothing could grieve me more than to offend or to hurt you; that there is nothing I would not bear, nothing I would not sacrifice, if my duty allowed, rather than give you a moment's pain. I can hardly expect you to believe me, and it seems most ungracious and almost insulting to say so; but, in truth, when the charge of the Indian debate was placed in my hands, it never occurred to me that you could be anywise interested therein."

"It was yours, then?" she exclaimed in a tone of pained surprise, which to his ears and conscience

conveyed reproach almost intolerable. Never had he faltered or felt humbled and overwhelmed in face of reprimand from a superior; never had it seemed to him possible to be so crushed and silenced by a sense not exactly of guilt or dishonour, but of seeming guilt and dishonour in another's eyes, as he could not help feeling when those few words and that look appeared to arraign him:

“I cannot expect you to understand or believe,” he said at last, “how, in professional and political work so exciting as this, one is drawn on from point to point; how one is absorbed in the immediate interest, and forgets all remoter considerations in the direct political bearings of the subject. At first I thought of the matter only as a defender of the Ministry; afterwards of Lord Penrith only as the author of what, forgive me for saying it, appeared on our side as a great wrong. I had scarcely leisure, scarcely opportunity, to think of him as an individual with private life and family connections, and to remember how what it came to my hand to do as public justice might be to you a cruel affront, a wanton offence. Believe me if you can—if I had recollected that Lord Penrith was your grandfather, I would never have taken the subject in hand at all; much less have treated it as I have. I dare not ask you to forgive me; but I do assure you, by my honour as a gentleman, that I never dreamed of the pain I was causing to you.” His tone and look expressed even more of remorseful, almost tremulous apology and supplication than he could convey in words.

“I can have nothing to forgive,” Alice replied. “I

did not know, though from what Edward said I might have guessed, who had written the article in the *Courier*. I suppose any other writer on your side would have said as much; and even if you had remembered us, there was no reason why you should pause. I saw that Edward considered you perfectly just; and if just, your severity could not lessen our debt to you. But you have spoken more than once so kindly to me, I thought you might wish—be willing—to spare us now. Mr. Darcy”—lapsing into the habitual address of former days—“this attack has almost killed Mamma. Of course she did not think I should speak to you. Whatever my grandfather may have been to others, *she* loves him; and you know how terribly she has suffered. She says, and Edward did not deny it, that if the *Courier* were silent the other papers would never say much about the matter. Yours is the only journal that supports the Ministry strongly, that has an interest in crushing a chief of Opposition. If you go on and keep the subject before the public, they say the others will be obliged to follow, and cannot or dare not defend the Earl; but if you drop it, they will be glad to do so. Have you not done enough, even in your own eyes? Can you not spare now?”

The recollection of his father's warning, which had impressed on him the belief that Lord Penrith had been the enemy of one whom he regarded with more than ordinary filial reverence and love, recurred to Darcy, checking his disposition to yield at once to Alice's solicitation; but at the next instant recurred Amy's just remark that the words did not necessarily

imply enmity, but rather distrust and censure. If not bound by professional duty or private piety to pursue the culprit, he would have been eager to sacrifice a much stronger interest than he felt in the quarrel to a much less earnest request from her.

“ Miss Kavanagh, I will promise you that my hand shall not trace another line on the subject, come what may. But I must tell you also that the only consequence will be that it must fall into other and probably more practised hands, that will strike more effectively if not more violently than I did. Still, I am more sorry than I can say that mine should have been the hand to give you pain, and it shall never do so again.”

The eloquent look of eyes half full of tears expressed not merely forgiveness but gratitude; and yet evidently Alice was but half satisfied, her petition but half spoken.

“ Major Darcy, they say, I believe, that Mr. Evans, the Editor of the *Courier*, is an intimate friend of yours; I remember hearing so in India, and Edward admitted it to-day.” The repeated familiar use of his colleague’s Christian name, recalling Philipson’s equally familiar mention of Alice herself, gave Darcy a pang whose meaning he scarcely realized. “ Can you not, will you not induce him to let this cruel matter rest now? You remember—that day when we first met?—Mr. Darcy, Mamma is dying, and this will embitter her few remaining days more than I could make you understand. Remembering what you saw, what she has suffered, will you not use your influence to spare her ? ”

The petition was more embarrassing than Alice could possibly understand. It asked for an interference certainly presumptuous, likely to be rebuked, obviously unjustifiable, and almost sure to fail. But to refuse a request so naturally, so eagerly pleaded by any young girl, would have been harder to Darcy than to most men; and to refuse Alice Kavanagh's entreaty was, be the entreaty never so unreasonable, simply impossible.

"I don't for a moment hope, Miss Kavanagh, that anything I can say will change Evans's ideas of right and public duty. I give you my word I will do all I can, will say much more than I have any right to do, will urge your wish to the point if needful of a quarrel with him; but I have no hope that I can help you. If Sir Francis persists with his motion—and I heard him say that he will do so—how can the *Courier* abstain from dealing with it? And how, dealing with it, can they spare? The article you think so cruel was written under Evans's own directions, and every word approved, some of the strongest suggested, by him."

"But," urged Alice, "if Sir Francis could be induced to drop the matter, the *Courier* need not follow it up."

"Perhaps not," replied Darcy. "But if you had heard Sir Francis as I have, you would hardly think that any persuasion will avail with him. He has already refused that which in Parliament is generally most effectual."

The girl's eyes drooped; she hesitated, endeavoured to speak, and stopped again. It was with an evident and powerful effort that she began at last; hardly able

longer to restrain her tears, her face flushed with manifest shame and embarrassment, conscious herself of little more than the fact that she was urging a most unusual and unreasonable demand; quite unaware in her eagerness of what she would certainly remember afterwards, that she was obviously assuming, relying upon, and pressing to the uttermost, the very strongest personal influence over her hearer.

“Sir Francis is—was a near relation of your mother. I once heard Mamma say to Papa (they never spoke on the subject when they knew we were by) that she had never known tenderness so great, forbearance carried so far, as Sir Francis showed to his cousin from the time when, as a little child, she was first entrusted to his guardianship till—it seemed her doing—there was a quarrel, after which they never met again. Mr. Darcy, I heard how Sir Francis Clavering spoke to you in the Lobby, and from one who knows him intimately; and,”—she hesitated again—“I must tell you all or you will not understand me, though I ought not to say it. He said that Sir Francis’s look then reminded him of those he had seen so often given to your mother in her girlhood, and that never again till last night had he seen Sir Francis look kindly on any living creature; that you would certainly have all your mother’s place in his regard. Cannot you, will you not, persuade him?”

Darcy started, astounded and dismayed at the request. It called upon him to presume on a favour in which he had no right to believe, to ask a boon from one on whom he had no claim; to interfere—he,

a youth wholly inexperienced in political life, wholly ignorant till yesterday of the great question involved—with the political and personal objects deeply cherished by a man of the gravest years and character, and of high social and Parliamentary rank. Such an interference was obviously unbecoming, almost unpardonable, and would most surely and most justly bring upon him the severest rebuke and highest displeasure of one to whom he naturally looked up with no little awe. His surprise, confusion, and reluctance were so obvious before he could find words to speak, that Alice felt and acknowledged the extravagance of her plea.

“I know I have no right to ask such a thing;—could have no right, if you owed to us all we owe to you, and more. Forgive me, Major Darcy, for saying so much. I dare say you cannot and ought not to do it; I know I ought not to have asked it; but if you had seen my mother’s distress you would not wonder that I forgot myself, forgot everything else, would do anything—would deserve to seem impertinent, exacting, shameless perhaps—if I could but save her from further suffering.”

As she spoke, she had laid one hand, in the earnestness of her entreaty, on his arm, and with the other had unconsciously clasped his own. The gesture, and the eyes that looked up so hopelessly yet so anxiously into his, embarrassed him even more than her words. Still, want of courage for so audacious an effort, and a more or less distinct sense of its gross impropriety, held him silent; till, no longer able to control the emotions that had prompted her to so

unusual and daring a step—perhaps made conscious by his hesitation how very far she had allowed those emotions to carry her—Alice sank on her knees and burst into unrestrained weeping.

Throughout the conversation, Lionel's memory had recurred more than once half consciously to the lines quoted by his sister, recalling the story of that susceptibility to feminine influence to which, age after age, so many a member of the House of Ultramar had owed the loss of fortune, fame, or life. To those who cannot easily withstand a lady's smile, a lady's tears—tears of real and deep emotion, and, above all, tears long suppressed and breaking out at last to attest the reality of the effort by which they had been controlled—are absolutely irresistible. Raising his visitor, and leading her unresisting to the nearest seat, Darcy knelt; and while she struggled in vain to regain her self-command, scarcely conscious of the broken words with which he attempted to soothe her, raised her passive hand to his lips and pressed upon it a kiss not less reverent, if longer and warmer, than the light touch of courtesy they had hardly ventured on an even more trying occasion.

“You ask me to do what I have no right to do, what I could not dream of doing under any less overpowering motive than your request. But your wish is law for me beyond any bounds of propriety, any restraints of custom or convention. Sir Francis bade me ask whatever kindness or service he could render me. I will ask for your sake that he will drop this accusation. But having asked that—and I have no hope to obtain it—Alice—I doubt whether, even

should he forgive my presumption, I could ever venture to look him in the face again."

Before she could recover herself sufficiently to answer, he had left the room and sent her sister and Amy to her aid. Half an hour had passed, and still the carriage remained at the gate of their little garden, when Amy entered his study, followed, to his great surprise, by Alice herself.

"Mr. Darcy," said the latter, raising the veil that had at first concealed her pale face and tear-swollen eyes, "I know how wrongly I have done in pressing you at all, how much further than was right or pardonable I urged you; and you answered me by granting instantly and unhesitatingly all I was so bold to entreat. But I feel that at last I have gone beyond what any lady ought to have asked, what any man should be pressed to grant. I cannot bear to remember what you must think of me. Forgive me, and try to forget to-day if you can."

He sprang up eagerly, and taking her hand, held it lightly and reverently as he answered—

"You could ask of me nothing that I should not wish to do, whatever it cost. I can only regret that I should have made it necessary for you to appeal to me in this matter. I have promised to do my best; forgive me if I fail. But, at any rate, Miss Kavanagh, believe that I understand your feeling; I respect and honour you the more that for your mother's sake you have been able to do what must have been so painful to you—to stoop to entreaty which it was almost as painful to me to hear. That I should obey your wishes is a thing of course, right or wrong, and

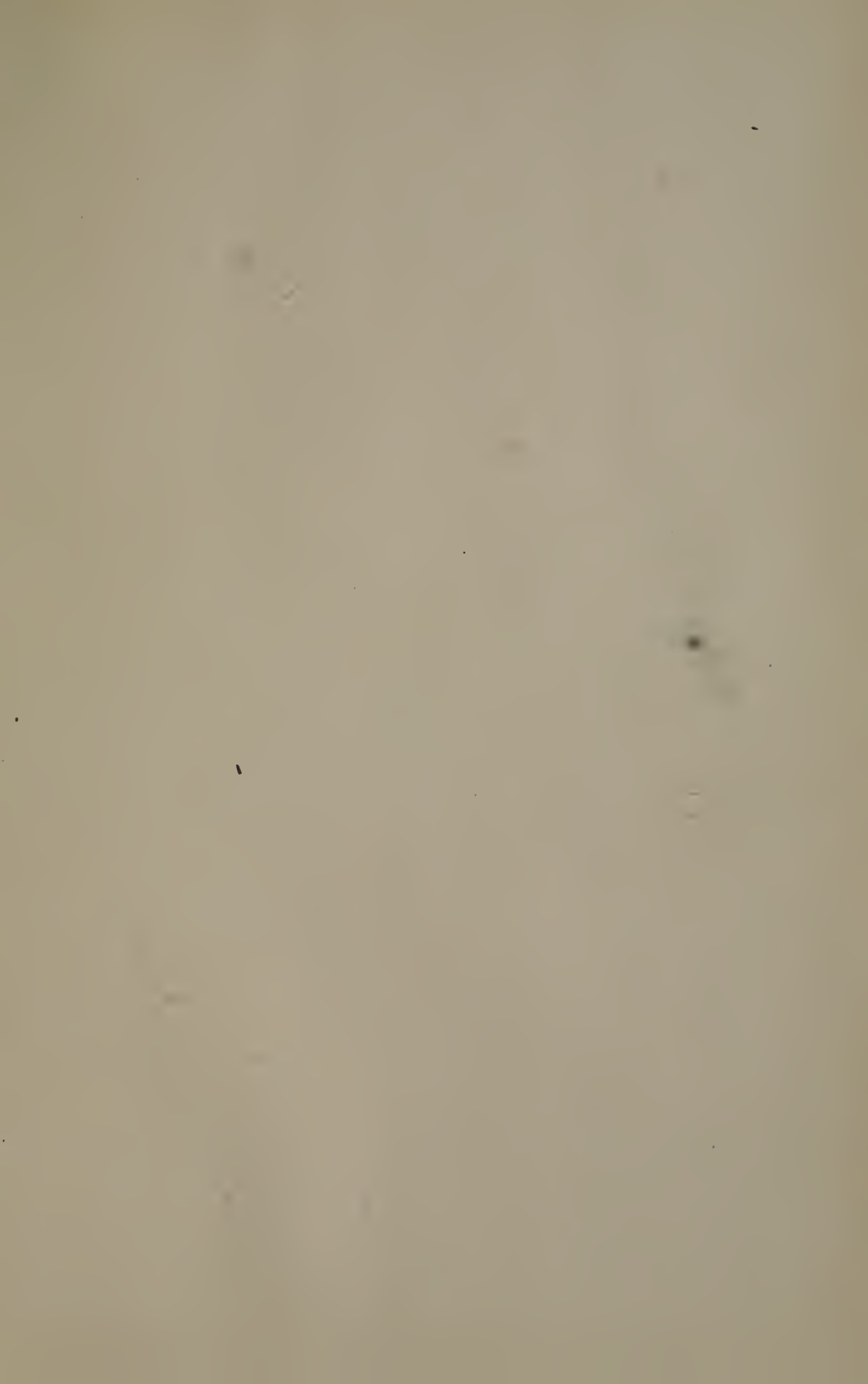
you have been right throughout. I could not do otherwise. But you pain me more than I can say when you show how keenly you are wounded by the recollection that you have condescended so far. It will be hard if that recollection remains to make the thought of me repugnant and painful to you, and to deny me the hope that we may meet again on terms as frank and kindly as before we parted at Southampton."

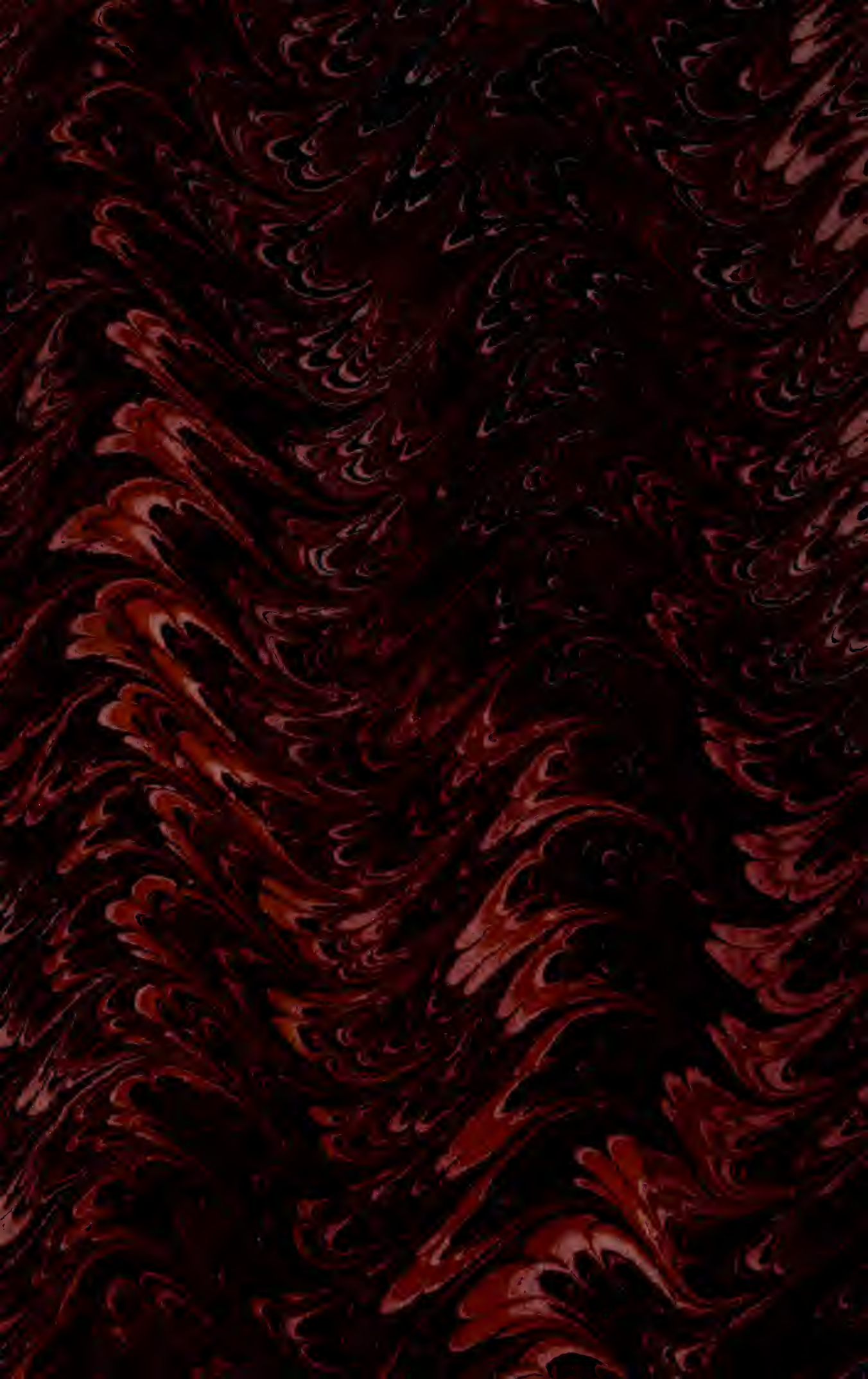
Not by tact or perception of her feeling, hardly perhaps by sympathy, but through the sense of the humiliation he would himself have felt in the memory of entreaties so urgent and unusual, and the instinct which taught him how far more intolerable must be such humiliation to the reserve and self-respect of her sex, Darcy had for once penetrated directly the mystery of a young girl's sentiment; and a soft rose colour returned to Alice's cheeks, her voice regained its usual firmness and sweetness, as she answered—

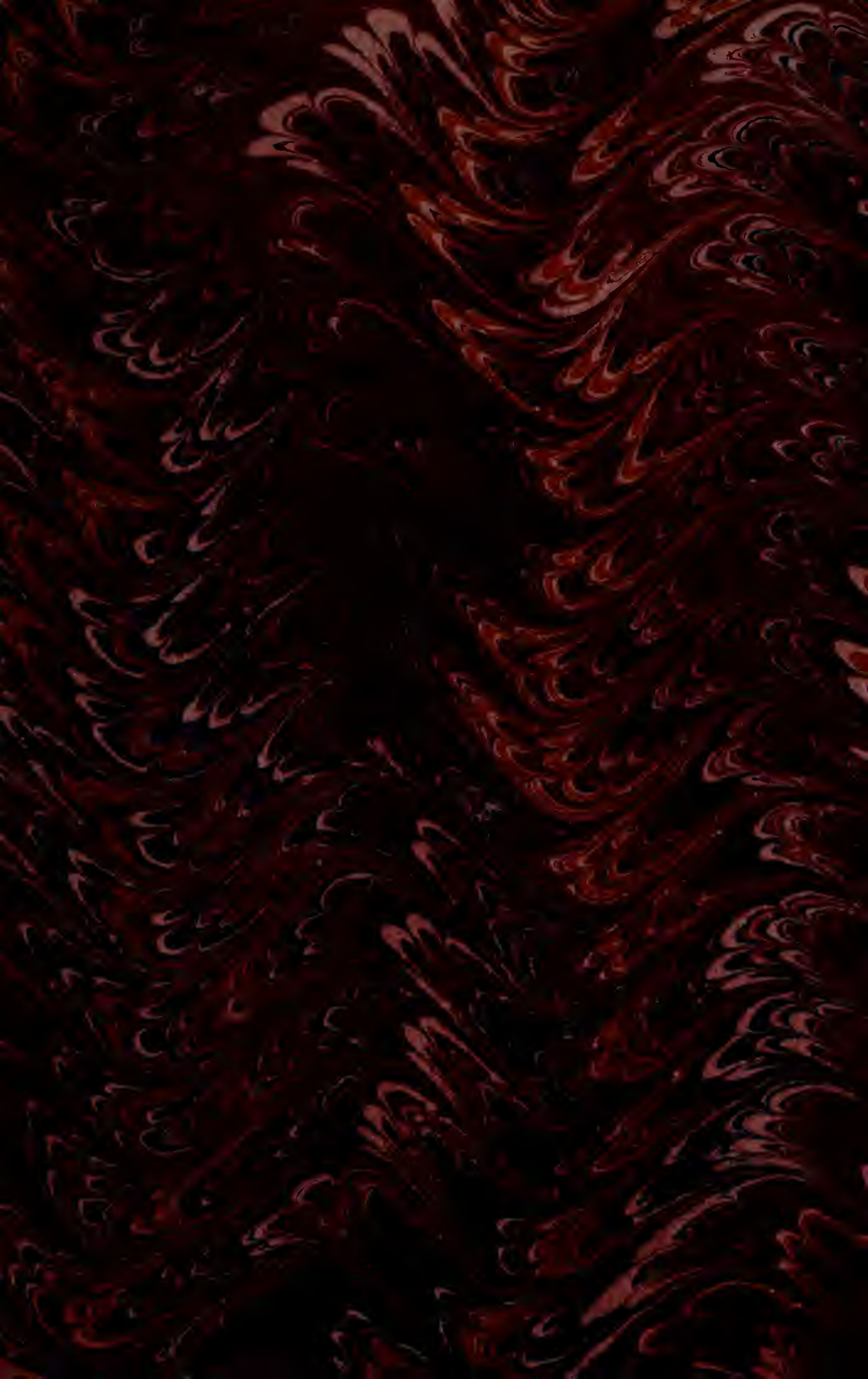
"I cannot but feel bitterly ashamed of myself, but you have done all that kindness and delicacy could do to lighten that shame; and it would be an ill return if I should forget your indulgence in the memory of my own need for it. I was grateful to you before; if we meet again—and under any roof but my grandfather's, I trust you and your sister will not hesitate to visit us—you shall find that I am even more grateful for your kindness to-day than while we only owed you life and safety."











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